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Spiritual Communings.

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SPIRITUAL COMMUNINGS.

BY

SIR ARCHIBALD EDMONSTONE, BART.



RIVINGTONS,

London, Oxford, and Cambridge.

1869.

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PREFACE.

A FEW words may be necessary with reference to the object of this little Book. It is devotional, and in no degree controversial, my design being to adhere closely to the teaching of the Prayer Book; and if in any way I may appear to have gone beyond that teaching, by assuming as truth what is not therein explicitly laid down, this is simply done in accordance, as I believe, with the authority which the Church acknowledges, namely, that of Catholic antiquity¹. As to the colloquial form here adopted, I can only say that I should scarcely have ventured to in-

¹ It was expressly declared in the Convocation held 1571, that the consent of the Catholic Fathers was to be considered as the rule for the exposition of Scripture. This, however, was not new, as it was held by the first Reformers; but it was specially brought forward at this time, when a new edition of the Articles had been printed under the direction of Bishop Jewel.

troduce the Divine Persons as interlocutors, but for the example, however distantly followed, of "The Imitation of Christ." The universal reception that wonderful book has met with seems to attach to it an authority only short of inspiration. And now, towards the close of a long life, I would venture to ask, whether of "the labour and sorrow" allotted to declining years, the one may not be relieved, and the other at least mitigated, by reposing, in child-like confidence, within the arms of everlasting Mercy? Physical infirmity will, of course, increase, strength decline, discomforts and uneasinesses bodily, it may be mental, supervene; beloved ones fall around, and blanks be left, over which the heart mourns,—yet God's face is not hid; hope and trust may produce a tempered cheerfulness, a mild sunshine enlighten our decline; and as we near the haven, the spirit may look forward with something of that complacency the poet describes:—

“ And when at length my wearied eyes I close,
Lit up by Thee a purer radiance glows;
And hope and faith beyond the tomb display
The opening glories of eternal day.”

(Translated from "*L'Immortalité*" of La Martine.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER I.

PAGE

- “ My son, attend to My words; incline thine ear unto
My sayings.”—*Prov. iv. 20* 1

CHAPTER II.

- “ Come unto Me, all that labour and are heavy laden,
and I will give you rest.”—*Matt. xi. 28* 5

CHAPTER III.

- “ My yoke is easy, and My burden is light.”—*Matt.*
xi. 30 12

CHAPTER IV.

- “ Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths
are peace.”—*Prov. iii. 17* 20

CHAPTER V.

	PAGE
“If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”— <i>Luke</i> ix. 23	26

CHAPTER VI.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”—1 <i>Tim.</i> i. 15	38
--	----

CHAPTER VII.

“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread: and when He had given thanks, He brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is My Body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup, when He had supped, saying, This cup is the New Testament in My Blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord’s death till He come.”—1 <i>Cor.</i> xi. 23—26	50
---	----

CHAPTER VIII.

“Whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the Body and Blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink

	PAGE
of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's Body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged."—1 Cor. xi. 27—31	68

CHAPTER IX.

"Examine me, O Lord, and prove me; try out my reins and my heart."—Ps. xxvi. 2	83
--	----

CHAPTER X.

"Cease, my son, to hear the instruction which causeth to err from the words of knowledge."—Prov. xix. 27.	92
---	----

CHAPTER XI.

"And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of Truth."—John xiv. 16	103
--	-----

CHAPTER XII.

"For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."—John v. 28, 29	113
---	-----

CHAPTER XIII.

PAGE

- “And He spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; when they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.”—*Luke* xxi. 29—31 . . . 129

CHAPTER XIV.

- “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me; Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me.”—*Ps.* xxiii. 3 . . . 135

CHAPTER I.

"MY SON, ATTEND TO MY WORDS; INCLINE THINE EAR
UNTO MY SAYINGS."—*Prov. iv. 20.*

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY ONE.

AS thy day is fast declining, and thy night drawing near, though I have never been far from thee, My son, it is nevertheless meet that thou shouldst come into closer communion with Me, that thy soul may draw afresh from the source of living waters which I have so freely opened. Thou shouldst pause, therefore, in thy pilgrimage, to see how far thy feet are walking in the right path. For this purpose I now desire to enter into special converse with thee, not in My own Person, but through one whom I have duly accredited, who in these communings may put such points of instruction before thee as thou mayest seem most to need, and who will listen, and reply to such questions as

may be fitting for thee to make and for him to answer.

THE DISCIPLE.

I am, Lord, a man of unclean lips ; how then can I venture to enter into converse with Thee, as one speaketh with his friend, even through the medium of another ? More fitting it would be for me to bow down in silence, and listen to the instructor with awe and trembling.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY ONE.

I have communed with others before, My son, as I now desire to commune with thee. Be not, therefore, dismayed ; but draw near to him whom I have commissioned to speak to thee, that thou mayest find comfort in thy trouble, and strength in thine infirmity.

THE DISCIPLE.

I have no desire, Lord, to search into what Thou hast not revealed ; but the path is at times dark and intricate, and to have some one who may guide me along it would preserve me safe.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY ONE.

Thou art right in not desiring to pry into

mysteries, since all has been disclosed which is fitting for thee to know in thy present imperfect state. My inspired Word, with the conduct and direction of that portion of the Church of which I have made thee a member, is sufficient to lead to all such knowledge as is needful for thee. Here, then, thou must be content. But as thou mayest find perplexities and hindrances in the way, My messenger will lead securely if thou listen to his voice.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know Thee, Lord, to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life¹. What I require is, to have my course made plain, that no false lights mislead, nor empty shadows deceive; and while my eyes are enlightened, that my heart be strengthened. I desire, therefore, to resign myself without reserve to such teaching as Thou, in Thy wisdom, seest fit to afford me.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY ONE.

To clear up all difficulties, and preserve from all hindrances, I do not promise; for the Christian's must ever be a life of conflict. But if

¹ John xiv. 6.

thou firmly put thy trust in Me, hold fast by My hand, obey the instruction afforded, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, but walk straightforward in the path pointed out, whatever perplexities thou mayest encounter, thy footsteps will not greatly err, and thou shalt eventually reach that bourn where all labour will be over, and all trouble cease.

CHAPTER II.

"COME UNTO ME, ALL THAT LABOUR AND ARE HEAVY LADEN, AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST."—*Matt. xi. 28.*

THE DISCIPLE.

THESE gracious words are addressed by our Blessed Lord to all that labour and are heavy laden ; and to whom are they more appropriate than to me ? Labour is my allotted portion from morning to evening, yea, even through the night watches I am not free.

THE MASTER.

Even so. Labour is thy birthright. Thy forefather Adam, before his fall, was put into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it¹. How much more, then, when the ground became cursed, bringing forth thorns and thistles to himself and his descendants ?

¹ Gen. ii. 15.

THE DISCIPLE.

True, my master; yet it is not labour, whether of body or mind, that chiefly weighs me down. Earthly toil may weary and exhaust, but is there not something more than this when our Blessed Saviour invites the heavy laden to come to Him?

THE MASTER.

It is well when thou canst rightly see in what thy labour chiefly consists. When thou knowest with what thou art heavily laden, then, indeed, canst thou come to Him for rest.

THE DISCIPLE.

It is sin that does so grievously weigh me down. When my soul would aspire upward, it is tied to earth; when my better will would desire to conform to the will of God, there is a lower and corrupt will which withstands its workings. Though regenerated in the waters of Baptism, and "I delight in the law of God after the inward man, I see another law in my members warring against the law of my mind," and I am led in weariness to exclaim, "O

wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? ”

THE MASTER.

It is to such the invitation is specially addressed, “ Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.”

THE DISCIPLE.

But how am I to come ? I would obey the summons, but how can one so weak, so corrupt, so borne down by iniquity, approach Him into whose presence nothing defiled can enter ?

THE MASTER.

It is because thou understandest not the call aright that thou hesitatest to obey. He “ is meek and lowly in heart ; ” dost not thou desire to be meek and lowly also ? Wouldst not thou be pure even as He is pure ? Would our Saviour and Redeemer have come into the world to save sinners if He had not desired to draw sinners to Himself ? Would He have died upon the Cross if He had not purposed to bring the labouring and heavy laden like thee to its foot ? Come closer to Him, and thou wilt per-

² Rom. vii. 22—24.

ceive that the call has not been made to thee in vain.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know that He hath said, "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out³." But how am I to come? I was made a son of God in Baptism, but since then, from my youth up even till now, I have been disobedient to His voice. And though I have not wandered so far as the prodigal in the parable, my footsteps have too often gone out of the way, and I have sought to slake my thirst at broken cisterns, rather than seek the waters of life.

THE MASTER.

But these waters of life have been never closed to thee, and are yet open if thou desire to drink of them.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know these fountains are not sealed. God hath said by the mouth of His prophet, "Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money⁴." He knoweth that I have nothing to offer; and "as the hart

³ John vi. 37.

⁴ Isa. lv. 1.

panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, O God ⁵." But, like Lot's wife, my eyes will still turn wistfully back, even though my steps may be following the straight path.

THE MASTER.

Here is thy fault. Thou wouldst fain serve two masters; thou hast been expressly taught that this is impossible.

THE DISCIPLE.

It is impossible; I know, I feel it to be so. And it is thus when Thou, O Blessed Saviour, invitest me to come unto Thee, I would earnestly desire help and guidance.

THE MASTER.

Help is ever ready when earnestly and sincerely sought, both in answer to prayer and by diligent search of God's revealed Word. What thou mayest further require I will, by Divine direction, put before thee as far as one, myself liable to error, may be permitted to do so.

⁵ Ps. xlii. 1.

THE DISCIPLE.

Speak, Lord, through the mouth of this Thy servant. Enlighten mine eyes that I may clearly see, and touch my heart that I may truly feel, the precepts Thou wilt thus graciously unfold. Oh, that Thou wouldst say to my soul, as Thou once did to the troubled waters, "Peace, be still!"

THE MASTER.

Thou hast said that thou hast a divided will, "A double-minded man is unstable in all his ways⁷." So wilt thou continue to be till thou hast decided whom thou wilt serve, God or Mammon.

THE DISCIPLE.

It is not that I doubt whose service I would follow. My heart desires in all sincerity to obey God's holy will, yet so strong is the stream against which I strive, so attractive the influences, so vivid the illusions the world presents, that mine eyes are dazzled, as it were, by a mirage, and the rock of salvation seems to recede like a shadow before me.

⁶ Mark iv. 39.

⁷ James i. 8.

THE MASTER.

Thy Blessed Saviour knoweth thy infirmities better than thou knowest them thyself, and "though a woman may forget her sucking child^a, yet will He never forget thee." He can, however, but exhort, He doth not compel. He may guide, but thou must yield thyself freely to His direction. He can and will plead for thee, but the act of self-resignation must be thine own. Give Him thy heart free and undivided, and then thou wilt listen to His call; then wilt thou come in confidence to Him; and however thou mayest labour and be heavily laden, thou wilt find rest for thy soul.

^a Isa. xlix. 15.

CHAPTER III.

“MY YOKE IS EASY, AND MY BURDEN IS LIGHT.”—
Matt. xi. 30.

THE MASTER.

THESE words were uttered by our Blessed Lord to encourage, not to make thee presumptuous. It must depend upon thyself how far thou canst appropriate them.

THE DISCIPLE.

There were saints of old, and there are, doubtless, thousands still, whose life has been a continued course of obedience, and though spots there be and blemishes, for even “the heavens are not clean in His sight¹,” they do but cast a thin shade between the radiance of the Sun of Righteousness and its reflection by

¹ Job xv. 15.

them. Their shoulders were, for the most part, fitted early to the yoke which they have ever borne with ease, if not with comfort. The burden was to them light, because there was little or no resistance, and His rod and staff supported them along whatever path they were called upon to walk. But such cannot apply to me. From want of habit to bear it, I feel the yoke oppressive, and the burden seems but to add to the weight of that with which I am so heavily laden.

THE MASTER.

It may be so at first, but it will not be so always, if thou in earnest set thyself to the task.

THE DISCIPLE.

Teach me, O Lord, the way of Thy commandments, and give me grace faithfully to fulfil the same. Then will my neck become habituated to the yoke, and my shoulders strengthened to bear the burden.

THE MASTER.

Yes, His grace will not be deficient if thou wilt in all sincerity ask it, and His ways will

open before thine eyes as thou diligently pursuest them.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know that of myself I can do nothing, and that our Blessed Lord hath graciously said, "Seek, and thou shalt find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you²." But I am "sore let and hindered in running the race that is set before me," and am unable, without further help, to ask, much less to act, aright. As yet the burden is too heavy for me to bear without almost sinking under its weight.

THE MASTER.

Thou hast said before that thou wast regenerated at thy Baptism. Thou then becamest "A member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven³." Nor wast thou left to struggle alone amid the waves of this troublesome world. The Holy Spirit was given as thine inmate; and however careless thou mayest have been, He has never left thee, nor will He leave thee till by continued and obstinate neglect thou rejectest Him. "Make

² Matt. vii. 7.

³ Church Catechism.

me a clean heart, O God ; and renew a right spirit within me ⁴." This must be thy constant prayer. "My son, give Me thine heart ⁵." Such is God's gracious invitation, and until thou canst comply with it thy labour will be but lost.

THE DISCIPLE.

In the Catechism I am taught to fear and love God "with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul, and with all my strength." But does this imply an exclusive love? I am directed in Holy Scripture to set my affection on things above, not on things on the earth ⁶. This might almost seem that I am to hold myself aloof from all social ties, an alien from all earthly connexions. And yet I cannot think that it is so intended.

THE MASTER.

There have been those in all ages of the Church who were called by a special vocation. Not a few who, vexed and wearied by the world, have retired to a life of seclusion, in order to give themselves exclusively to God. Others

⁴ Ps. li. 10.

⁵ Prov. xxiii. 26.

⁶ Col. iii. 2.

again, under the peculiar influence of the Spirit, have, from their youth up, withdrawn from ordinary business and occupations to devote themselves to works of charity. But the ways to heaven are divers; some more direct, some, it may be, more circuitous. In the second Table of the Decalogue thou art directed "to love thy neighbour as thyself;" and St. John says, "This commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also'." It is clear, then, that the love of God must be diffusive, extending from the Creator to the creature. For His Providence still watches over the world which He made, and the divers orders of men are placed by Divine appointment in their several stations to carry out His work. In doing this thou hast thine own place. Thy lot is laid among thy fellow-men to perform the duties of active and social life. Nor is thy task an easy one. The prize set before thee is not to be attained but by great and continuous exertion; while the trials and temptations thou encounterest are purposely sent to test thy powers and strengthen thee for the conflict. And if thou stumble and fall,

7 1 John iv. 21.

there is a hand ever ready to raise and support, till at the end temptation and trial become the means by which thou wilt obtain the victory. Temptations ever vary in nature and degree, and trials are adapted to dispositions and circumstances. Still each condition of life must pass through the refiner's fire to temper it for its use in the Divine armoury. Hence the direction to set your affection on things above, not on things of the earth. The conflict is on earth, the prize is in heaven; and if, while engaged in the strife, you do not fix your thoughts and desires on the great object for which you are contending, that object will never be gained. But while warned against setting your affections on things of the earth, thou hast no commandment against giving them in their degree to human objects, or forming and fostering social ties. When man was created after the image of God, love was a portion of the Divine nature implanted by the Creator. And this principle, though debased and corrupted at the fall, still survives, to be restored to its original brightness at the second creation. The Triune God is the primary object of man's love, the Creator, the

Redeemer, and the Sanctifier, but this love is fostered and matured for its full and perfect development by passing through the medium of human affections. "Beloved," says the Apostle quoted above, "let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God *." Charity, we are told, is greater than faith and hope, but charity must have its object on which to work. Hence the progressive diffusion of love through the whole social system of man. First commensurate with our race, a general sympathy and benevolence. Then its more concentrated development through the various gradations of kindred, till it reaches its climax in the closest ties of affinity, and becomes sublimated for its perfection in a future state of existence.

THE DISCIPLE.

I can understand how the progress of human love prepares and fits for the exercise of divine. But how to fix my affections on an object so infinitely removed beyond my comprehension, here is my difficulty. I can worship, fear, and trust an ubiquitous, omniscient, and omnipotent

* 1 John iv. 7.

Spirit; I can admire His goodness, and be grateful for His mercies; but when commanded to love an incorporeal Essence, such as God is represented to be, I feel perplexed at the idea.

THE MASTER.

But this difficulty may be met, and thy perplexity removed, when thou rememberest that it is not an incorporeal God, but God incarnate, Who, as Man, lived, suffered, and died for thee, and Who loves thee with a love far beyond what thou canst ever return. Thou mayest love the Godhead of the Father through the Manhood of the Son, and in proportion as this love soars above all human affections, as to its ultimate object, wilt thou be fitted for thy change to a higher state of existence. This love may vary in degree and fervour according to varying temperaments and circumstances, but it must exist as an active and prevailing principle. Thou canst labour for objects near and dear to thee on earth, and take pleasure in thy toil; serve God with a like willingness, and thou wilt find the yoke easy and the burden light.

CHAPTER IV.

"HER WAYS ARE WAYS OF PLEASANTNESS, AND ALL HER PATHS ARE PEACE."—*Prov.* iii. 17.

THE DISCIPLE.

YES, my Master, I know that those who walk stedfastly in the paths of true religion are supported and comforted by Divine Grace, but surely the servants of God have griefs of their own; nor do I see how it can be said that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace," amid the sorrows and troubles with which they are surrounded.

THE MASTER.

Our Blessed Lord warned those who would be His disciples, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword¹." Again, He says, "In

¹ *Matt.* x. 37.

the world ye shall have tribulation." But mark the conclusion, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world²."

THE DISCIPLE.

I doubt not the victory that our Saviour and Redeemer gained over sin and death, but still I would humbly ask instruction as to how these two statements can be reconciled. If our path is one of tribulation, how can it be pleasant? if a scene of conflict, how can it be peace?

THE MASTER.

Thou seest how in Scripture seeming paradoxes are often used in order effectually to show forth the doctrine inculcated in a striking and forcible manner. It is thus the attention is more deeply engaged when called upon to examine and compare passage with passage, while truth stands against truth in apparent opposition.

THE DISCIPLE.

But there can be no contradiction in the inspired Word: and I am only now desirous to

² John xvi. 33.

comprehend how statements which seem so diverse can be made to agree.

THE MASTER.

These statements can, and will be reconciled when duly weighed and understood. Take a case of common life. A man is engaged in a course of turmoil, of strife and anxiety, in the incessant wear and tear of his public occupation; but he returns to a home of comfort and peace. So in a far greater degree is the ordinary course of him who devotes himself to God. The Church will ever be, while on earth, in a militant state. Not merely does the enemy from without never cease in his attacks, but there will be doubt, division, and disquietude even within the fold. Men, faithful at heart, will yet be desirous to pry into matters not distinctly revealed, and dogmatic truths will present themselves to various minds under various aspects. Did this lead to mutual forbearance, and to greater exercise of Christian charity, all would be well; but the reverse is too often the case. Violent disputations tend to irreconcilable differences; and though the boundary of the vineyard may be unbroken,

the interior will present a scene of strife and confusion, from which the quiet spirit hastes, as far as may be, to escape. Here, then, is tribulation—instead of harmony, discord—not rest, but perplexity. Go forward, however, and thou wilt find that God's Word is true: that "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace." Retire from the turmoil to thine inner self. Seek the Holy Spirit in the sanctuary of thine own spirit. There, reposing as a wearied child on the bosom of thy God, thou wilt find pleasant comfort and peace for thy soul now, more perfect peace for thy ransomed spirit hereafter.

THE DISCIPLE.

Even so, my Master; but false lights may deceive the most wary. With so many by-paths, how can I feel secure that I choose the right? And I may at last be following a shadow, when I believe that I am pursuing the substance.

THE MASTER.

Thou must indeed be on thy guard, for error in religion is dangerous; fatal, if the deviation be wide; bewildering and perplexing,

even if it be but slight. Thou art not learned : thou canst not always judge between conflicting claims on thy conviction ; but take the best means in thy power. Follow the teaching of the Church with care. Distrust new and startling theories : and, if opportunity offer, apply, when thou canst not clearly see thy way, to some one on whose judgment thou believest thou mayest rely. This doing in an humble spirit, thou wilt assuredly not deviate into fatal heresy. And if, in the conflicting opinions of the day, thou still feel thy path uncertain, doubt not that thine error, if into such thou fall, will be made full allowance for in the day of final account. Thou wilt not stand before a Judge Who is extreme to mark what has been done amiss, but one Who will look into thy heart ; and if all be right there, fear not but what thou wilt hear the gracious words, " Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

THE DISCIPLE.

Yes, I do see how, among the trials and troubles of life, whatever shape they assume, I can turn securely to my Blessed Redeemer as my Guide, my Guardian, and my Friend. In

sorrow the Holy Spirit will be a sure and certain consolation ; in difficulty and danger He will take me by the hand ; and my hearty prayer is, that I may rest confidently in this conviction.

THE MASTER.

Our God is, as the prophet saith, "a God that hideth Himself." His ways are to us secret, into His counsels we cannot pierce ; but to the eye of faith He is nevertheless ever manifest, to the trust of faith ever secure. As by the atmosphere around our animal life is preserved, the purer it breathes the more healthful to us and vigorous, so is our spiritual life nourished by the atmosphere of God's Providence more healthful, too, and vigorous, in proportion as we rise above the noxious vapours of earth. Verily "in Him we live, and move, and have our being : " to the wellbeing of our soul and body here, to their everlasting glorification hereafter.

CHAPTER V.

"IF ANY MAN WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS DAILY, AND FOLLOW ME."—*Luke ix. 23.*

THE MASTER.

I HAVE instructed thee how our Blessed Lord's words may be good to thee: "My yoke is easy and My burden light;" and I have likewise pointed out how thou mayest find "the ways of wisdom ways of pleasantness, and all her paths peace." Yet thou hast this lesson further to learn, that thou must deny thyself, and take up thy cross daily, if thou wouldst follow Him.

THE DISCIPLE.

This injunction is more than once repeated in the Gospel, and I would endeavour to conform to it as my rule of life, yet I am not sure that I comprehend it to the full extent of its meaning.

To deny myself from the indulgence of sinful appetites and affections I strive, however imperfectly. But these words seem to imply something beyond, and in this I would desire in all humility to be instructed.

THE MASTER.

Thou doest well to refuse thyself all unlawful indulgences; but to deny thyself as thou art enjoined, has, as thou supposest, a wider comprehension. To abstain from sin in all its various guises; to shut thine eyes to its allurements, however enticing; and to turn a deaf ear to seduction which might lead astray,—this is, indeed, a primary duty, to strengthen in the performance of which thou hast the Holy Spirit within to suggest good resolutions, and to sustain in their operation. But to deny thyself in things lawful, in order to practise thee in obedience; to turn thy head from things pleasurable, lest they obtain the mastery; to subjugate thy tastes and affections by a rule of self-discipline,—this is to lead a life of self-denial; and the more thou practise it, the more easy will thy upward course become.

THE DISCIPLE.

I understand that I must walk circumspectly in order that I may walk securely, and that moderation in the enjoyment of what God is pleased to allow is necessary in order to avoid abuse; but in the exercise of self-denial is there any fixed rule by which I may conform;—any code of observance I should follow?

THE MASTER.

Strict rules or codes of observances would in this, as in other matters, be a snare. The Pharisee acted by such rule in his daily walk,—yet what was the result? Was he a more faithful observer of the law of Moses because he paid strict tithe of anise and cummin? I repeat, it is not the letter, but the spirit thou must strive to obey. And to this end thou wilt often find the injunctions given in the Gospel. When our Lord tells His disciples that they cannot come to Him unless they hate “father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and their own life also¹,” do you

¹ Luke xiv. 26.

not perceive how in this the letter would kill, while the spirit profiteth? So it must be in the practice of self-denial. Thou must deny thyself; that is a positive injunction; but in what manner or degree, that must be left to thine own enlightened conscience. Thus far, however, I may advise thee. Make a rule, as far as thou be able, to refuse thyself some gratification towards which thine inclination leads, or at least restrict thyself in some object in which thou mightest lawfully indulge, with a view to the acquirement of habitual self-control. Thus thou wilt gradually learn to practise that denial of self to which the precepts of the Gospel would direct thee.

THE DISCIPLE.

I see, my Master, how this habit may be acquired, and will endeavour to order my ways accordingly; but when I am enjoined to take up my cross, and that daily, if I desire to follow the steps of my Blessed Saviour, I am somewhat perplexed. Crosses do not seem to lie daily in my path, and if I do not find them there, am I to go forth and seek them? Am I to search for sorrow and suffering, when in my

ordinary course of life they do not appear to come in my way?

THE MASTER.

Suffering is inextricably mixed up with the unfathomable mystery of the existence of sin. To meet the justice of God, where sin has entered, suffering must follow, and hence its influence over the whole world. But pain and sorrow are not confined to the guilty. The first recorded event after Adam's expulsion from Paradise was the murder of the innocent Abel by his brother. So the mystery of suffering has prevailed ever since, while the advent of our Blessed Lord has altogether changed its character. What was originally a curse to our fallen nature, and as such continues to all to whom it comes as the punishment of unrepented sin, is converted into a blessing unto those who are renewed and washed clean in His precious blood. It cements the union between the Head and the members. As He took upon Himself the sins of the whole world, so did He pay the penalty of suffering to the offended justice of the Father. And to those who are His by adoption and grace, He has distinctly declared that "if

we suffer, we shall also reign with Him²." And thus it is we are called upon to take up our cross. Suffering becomes our portion as it was His, and so inseparable does this union become, that in taking up our cross we are sharers in His, at the same time that He is helping us to bear our own. Indeed so immeasurable is the efficacy of our Blessed Lord's Passion, that we are utterly unable to define the extent to which mankind are profited by it. Thus much, however, we do know, that as community of sorrow often makes community of feeling and interest among men, so in the degree in which Christ's faithful servants are called to endure, so much closer are they drawn into sympathy with Him here, if their sufferings are borne in cheerful resignation, and more nearly may they hope to enjoy His presence hereafter.

THE DISCIPLE.

I see, my Master, how great is the efficacy of the Redeemer's sufferings, and how His sons must expect to suffer also; but still I would ask, when told to take up my cross, am I to go out of my way to seek it, or merely to meet what

² Tim. ii. 12.

God may see fit to impose, in a thankful and acquiescent spirit?

THE MASTER.

Thou canst now better understand how not a few of the Saints, in their desire for perfection, have sought to share in their Lord's Passion by a course of severe and painful self-infliction, but to such thou art not appointed. God's governance is not confined to any rule man can comprehend. Thy path rather lies in the strict observance of the ordinary duties of life, than in any marked act of self-sacrifice. There might be fear lest thou wert following thine own imagination, if the way be not distinctly marked by Divine ordering.

THE DISCIPLE.

I would indeed desire to follow God's guidance implicitly, and my prayer is, that I may in all things see it aright amid the perplexing workings of His Providence. The intensity of suffering to which some are exposed, more than nature could sustain unless supported by His hand, renders the bearing of the cross placed on their shoulders but a simple act of patient

resignation. But not so with others. In their even course of life they appear to pass on easily, without a cross to bear. All around them looks smooth, and they pursue their way in peace and comfort. How does our Lord's declaration, that they must suffer if they would reign with Him, apply to them ?

THE MASTER.

Things are not always as they appear, and if thou look a little below the surface, into the inner life of the earnest Christian, thou wilt see a cross in the pathway of each, which he is bound to take up. The cross which lies at his feet need not be an instrument of torture, as it was to our Blessed Lord, and as it has been to many of His devoted servants. But it is a cross nevertheless, and to take it up freely and unreservedly is a trial of faith and a test of obedience. To bear with evenness and complacency the roughnesses and discordances of social intercourse ; to be tolerant, yet bold, amid the fierce conflict of opinion ; to be firm, nay stern, if need be, in the assertion of truth ; to be settled and calm in the ordinary struggles of daily life, and the uncongenialities too often experienced in do-

mestic intimacy,—each may find a cross ready to his hand without going out of his way in search of it. The duty incumbent on thee is to take it up. Not that it is forbidden to apply such alleviations to its weight as may be within thy reach, but not to flinch from a love of ease, or dread of trouble, from what the Providence of God has imposed; to turn neither to the right hand nor the left, to avoid the performance of a duty, however distasteful, when it is placed in thy way. This doing thou need not fear; but thou wilt find the means of denying thyself, if thou keep thine eyes steadily fixed on the service of God.

THE DISCIPLE.

I see better, my Master, what is meant by taking up my cross. It lies habitually before me in my daily walk; but methinks there are crosses from within which press not less heavily upon me than those from without.

THE MASTER.

In proportion as thou art roused to greater zeal and earnestness will crosses appear before thee which thou didst not before perceive. But

while the difficulties of thy Christian walk become more plain and numerous, and thou strivest to meet and overcome them, thou must be careful lest self-consciousness cast a shadow across it. Whatever thou mayest do, or whatever sacrifice thou mayest make, let it be performed in a spirit of loving obedience. If not humble alike before God and man, thy labour, be it what it will, may yet be in vain. It is dedication of thy whole self that God requires ; and yet thy life will not be long enough for thee to bring this resignation to perfection.

THE DISCIPLE.

I well know how deficient I am in the performance of this duty, how slow to submit myself to His holy will and pleasure ; and that, too, when He has dealt so lovingly with me ! But on looking out on the miseries with which the world is afflicted, the enemy will not unfrequently whisper in my ear that God's ways are not equal, seeing how much some are favoured both temporally and spiritually through the whole course of their lives.

THE MASTER.

Thou must submit to live now by faith, patiently waiting for a future revelation. One thing, however, I must impress upon thee, which men are apt to overlook. Thou seest now but the first scene of an everlasting existence. Every human being that is born into the world is born with a view to his future destination, though each is at liberty to choose his course for good or evil. In the mystery of God's providence His foreknowledge does not prevent man's free agency; and, of the successive myriads of human beings, each has his own place allotted to him. To such as make their calling and election sure, our blessed Lord's announcement specially refers, that in His Father's house are many mansions, suited to the innumerable diversities of occupation in which man's glorified humanity will be employed. Some of thy perplexities, therefore, may be, to a degree at least, solved when thou considerest that life here is a course of training preparatory to that which is to follow; and if some have to undergo a severer discipline than others, it is with regard to the position they

may eventually be called to occupy. Human nature has been greatly corrupted, and requires to be greatly purified to fit it for restoration. And with this thou mayest rest content. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling³." Assist others in their course to the utmost of thine ability. Check in thyself every tendency to self-indulgence, even where the object itself be lawful. Deny thyself manfully, especially on any point where doubt could exist. Bear thine own sorrows with patient submission. Support the sufferings of others with charity and tenderness: for "we know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren⁴." Thus faithfully performing, thou wilt find the crosses in thy way no hindrances, but rather instruments for so training in thy warfare as to fit thee for the crown of victory amid the assembled company of the faithful.

³ Phil. ii. 12.

⁴ 1 John iii. 14.

CHAPTER VI.

"THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING, AND WORTHY OF ALL ACCEPTATION, THAT CHRIST JESUS CAME INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE SINNERS."—1 *Tim.* i. 15.

THE DISCIPLE.

THIS blessed truth, my Master, was impressed upon my mind at the earliest dawning of religious perception. From the first I have received it without questioning or demur; nor has a doubt ever passed my thoughts as to the Divine and human natures being united to effect the marvellous work of man's salvation. But may not some light be further thrown upon what I cannot but consider a passage peculiarly dark in His doings, not to gratify curiosity, but to keep my feet from stumbling?

THE MASTER.

Ask, and I will reply as far as I myself be

able ; but the ways of God's Providence are so transcendent, so wonderful in their obscurity, that the finite understanding could not apprehend them, even were the veil of mystery raised to thy bewildered sight. Take the case of the Incarnation. Unless thy powers were supernaturally illuminated, could they grasp the idea of a spiritual Essence, personal, but omnipresent, localized within the frame of a newborn Infant ; the God of Heaven " wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger ;" the Second Person of the Holy Trinity living on earth as man, associating with men as His fellows, liable to human infirmity, suffering more than man ever suffered, and dying in extremest agony as man ; then coming forth from the grave, reappearing upon earth, and still clothed with humanity, openly and visibly ascending into Heaven ? Exalt intellect to the utmost, it will yet be baffled, and must at last accept the Incarnation of the Son of God as a matter of faith ; a mystery into which the most powerful minds have been as unable to penetrate as the most ignorant of the human race.

THE DISCIPLE.

The mystery of the Incarnation so surpasses my understanding that I have ever received it as I have been taught. And even now I scarcely know whether without presumption I may venture to make inquiry as to a matter which will often present itself to my inner meditation. The subject, indeed, seems too deep for my apprehension.

THE MASTER.

It matters not how deep the subject if thy words be uttered in a spirit of humility. They will not offend, though they may not meet with a reply.

THE DISCIPLE.

God's love is over all His works. I should feel it to be so, even if He had not Himself declared it. But if the terms of man's salvation be such only as we are taught in His revealed Word, how few, comparatively, among the myriads of created beings can attain unto it! For four thousand years before our Blessed Lord's Advent, and over how large a portion of the habitable world even now, hath the sound of

the Gospel never reached ! And then, again, in Christian lands, in our own country, peculiarly favoured as we believe it to be, how many are there who from the cradle to the grave are nearly as ignorant of God as the merest savage ! Born in vice and sin, they, through their whole lives, breathe its atmosphere, and learn nothing but evil ; and, though multitudes of His devoted servants go forth early and late into the vineyard which the "wild boar of the forest" is rooting up, they are wholly inadequate, perceptibly, to stem the deadly corruption. The great enemy of our salvation spreads his nets far and wide without means being afforded, or even wish among his victims, to escape ; and they pass out of this world without ever having had a gleam of comfort here, or a hope, perhaps a thought, of the future. Then how various the appliances even to those who have been brought up within the Christian fold ! Some dispositions how apt to good, and how great their advantages for its cultivation ! Others by nature how prone to evil, with little from without to discipline or counteract it ! Yet God's love is over all ; and I shrink with horror from the thought promulged by some who, seeking to

account for the phenomenon by a partial interpretation of His holy Word, assume that multitudes are born into the world for the sole foreseen purpose of eternal condemnation. If I pass not the limit of lawful inquiry, may I not ask some solution of this dark and awful perplexity?

THE MASTER.

Thou askest a hard thing, for the solution thou seekest is beyond my power to afford. Can the creature scan the work of the Creator? Can man search into the hidden purposes of God? "Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, Why hast Thou made me thus? Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour¹?"

THE DISCIPLE.

True, my Master. But the Apostle likewise says, "Therefore hath He mercy on whom He will have mercy, and whom He will He hardeneth." And he continues in the words of the gainsayer, "Wherefore doth He find fault?

¹ Rom. ix. 20, 21.

For who hath resisted His will?² Whence cometh, then, man's free will? Whence his responsibility?

THE MASTER.

I have said that the ways of God are past man's finding out, and perilous has been the path to those who have formed systems upon partial and one-sided knowledge. But a careful weighing of the revealed Word will disclose enough to show that there is deep wisdom in all God's dealings with His creatures. If He has "mercy on whom He will have mercy," it is because they receive the terms offered. If "He hardeneth whom He will," it is because, as a divine law, habitual refusal of His proffered mercy deadens the spiritual perception; the seed has fallen on "barren and dry ground, where no water is." No one will perish everlastingly but by his own fault. Of the chosen nation He speaks, "All day long have I stretched forth My hands to a disobedient and gainsaying people³;" and over and over again are we assured that "God willeth not the death of a sinner, but rather that he should be con-

² Rom. ix. 18, 19.

³ Rom. x. 21.

verted and live." His will may be frustrated by man's impenitence, but it would be but mockery thus to address His creatures if they had no power to comply with the call. Salvation is therefore closed to none by an absolute decree, yet there is an election in the secret councils of God, by which some are made "unto honour, and some unto dishonour⁴." Some are exalted to higher privileges and trust, have a greater work to accomplish in the vineyard; others are left to inferior positions, have fewer gifts and less responsibilities. None are framed for nothing, though many, how many! so misuse what is committed to them, that it would have been better, far better, had they never been born. For none, however, can there be perfect security. "Many are called, but few chosen:" and Scripture warns us that, of the first appointed to the chiefest places in the councils of God on earth, not a few shall be last; and some of the lowest in the scale of spiritual privileges shall have a foremost place in their celestial inheritance.

⁴ Rom. ix. 21.

THE DISCIPLE.

I have never doubted that "there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit^s," and that every one who is duly called has his own appointed work. But as to those to whom the Gospel is a strange sound, whom the knowledge of God has never reached, whether it be the heathen abroad or the worse than heathen at home, if "without holiness no one can see the Lord," what place is there in the vineyard—how can they escape the doom of which they are ignorant?

THE MASTER.

I said before that in the existing order of things there is much that is utterly beyond our comprehension. A mystery covers the whole, which can be but very partially unveiled. Thou must fall back, therefore, on the confidence that the Lord of all cannot but do right, with hope that the time will come when all that is now so dark will be made clear as the noonday. Of one thing, however, we may rest secure, namely, that the virtue of our

^s 1 Cor. xii. 1.

Blessed Lord's Incarnation, and the efficacy of His Atonement have spread far beyond what has been revealed to us. "The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" was devised in the Divine councils through all eternity. The fall of man was foreseen, and the remedy provided even from "the beginning." How sin came into existence we know not; but the first manifestation of it with which we are acquainted was in the rebellion of a portion of the angelic host. Whether man was created to supply their place we are not informed; but had our first parents not yielded to the seduction of the devil, immortality would have remained with their descendants, begun on earth, continued in Heaven. Man's race, however, was ruined; yet that ruin was to be repaired, and that by a stupendous act of Divine Love. Our Creator was to become our Brother, a sharer of our nature, in all its sufferings and in its sorrows. And not only did He share, but He bore for us far more than we could bear for ourselves, the weight and penalty of the sins of the whole world, in an agony beyond our capacity to comprehend. Tortures bodily, tortures mental, tortures spiritual, and all this "for us men and

for our salvation." But if God exhibited such marvellous love towards His fallen creatures, a reciprocity of love must be shown by those who "were dead, and are alive again; were lost, and are found." And love, working through obedience, produceth the holiness without which no one can see the Lord. But here the difficulty to which thou hast referred commences. God has not seen proper to reveal the light of His Gospel to all His creatures alike. Why He hath not done so it is not for us to inquire. It is sufficient that so it is. Some are in utter darkness, like the heathen, and like too many among ourselves; to others the light glimmers, but obscurely. Now in the parable the talents were awarded in very various portions, but some one talent was allotted to each. And this, I think, may help to guide us in our present inquiry. Our Blessed Lord died for the salvation of all men—of all who do not reject the terms of salvation offered them. Where no offer has been made, there can be no rejection; those therefore to whom, in the mystery of His Providence, He hath not revealed Himself, must be left to His uncovenanted mercies. But the Holy Spirit is, we

know, the principle of life, of life spiritual and life temporal, and acts inwardly, even where there is no given rule of conduct; for St. Paul tells us, "When the Gentiles do by nature the things contained in the law, these, not having the law, are a law unto themselves; which show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another." You see, then, there is a law of conscience by which those will be tried on whom the light of the Gospel hath not shone. And that God will deal with all with an equal hand no one need doubt who believeth in Him. Every variety of circumstance, of disposition or station, every advantage or disadvantage, every trial or trouble, every joy or sorrow, every temptation resisted or yielded to, will be put into the scale of evenly-balanced justice, consistent, however, with such a weight of mercy as love unappreciable can bestow. Doubt we not, then, for a moment that Thou, O God, so dealest with all Thy creatures that "Thou wilt be justified in Thy sayings, and wilt overcome when Thou art

judged⁶," at the final adjustment when "mercy and truth shall meet together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other⁷."

⁶ Rom. iii. 4.

⁷ Ps. lxxxix. 10.

CHAPTER VII.

"FOR I HAVE RECEIVED OF THE LORD THAT WHICH ALSO I DELIVERED UNTO YOU, THAT THE LORD JESUS THE SAME NIGHT IN WHICH HE WAS BETRAYED TOOK BREAD: AND WHEN HE HAD GIVEN THANKS, HE BRAKE IT, AND SAID, TAKE, EAT: THIS IS MY BODY, WHICH IS BROKEN FOR YOU: THIS DO IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME. AFTER THE SAME MANNER ALSO HE TOOK THE CUP, WHEN HE HAD SUPPED, SAYING, THIS CUP IS THE NEW TESTAMENT IN MY BLOOD: THIS DO YE, AS OFT AS YE DRINK IT, IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME. FOR AS OFTEN AS YE EAT THIS BREAD, AND DRINK THIS CUP, YE DO SHOW THE LORD'S DEATH TILL HE COME."—1 Cor. xi. 23—26.

THE MASTER.

THE Holy Eucharist is a matter of such deep and vital importance, that through the difficulties which, in common with most inquirers, thou hast doubtless experienced, I am desirous of affording what help I may be able; conscious though I am of my own fallibility

amid the conflicting opinions which prevail. Having sought, however, the authorities to which the Church directs, my earnest prayer is that I may not be a blind guide, entangled in error when seeking the truth. But such light as I believe to have gained for myself I am ready to communicate to thee.

THE DISCIPLE.

I shall indeed, my Master, be thankful for thy aid. Even from my youth up, ever since I was presented to the Bishop for confirmation, I have, at intervals, partaken of this blessed Sacrament, and I humbly hope to my soul's comfort; but there are, as thou supposest, difficulties which I have never as yet been able satisfactorily to solve.

THE MASTER.

Mystery does, indeed, involve this Divine ordinance, but the difficulty has been largely increased by the various interpretations that have been put upon our Blessed Lord's words.

THE DISCIPLE.

Methinks it is a sad proof of human infirmity that this ordinance, which was given to solace

and support, and draw our spirits nearer to the Blessed Giver, should have been the battle-field of contention, each Church and communion having taken its own ground, rendering divisions more and more irreconcilable.

THE MASTER.

It will always be so where man attempts to go beyond what God has disclosed. No human eye can penetrate a mystery; and since the Holy Eucharist must be admitted to be such, though differences of opinion would still have existed, they would never have led to the divisions we deplore, had reason not interfered beyond its proper sphere.

THE DISCIPLE.

I have ever, my Master, sought to subdue my reason to my faith. But our Lord's words are indeed awfully mysterious, and I would humbly ask such explanation as thou hast kindly offered to afford.

THE MASTER.

The guide to which I would first direct you is the Book of Common Prayer; for notwithstanding the confusion of the period in which

that book was framed, it has, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, preserved all essential points of doctrine in their primitive purity. As regards the Eucharist, then, it is expressly stated that we eat our Lord's Body, and drink His Blood, after the consecration of the bread and wine by the priest. And in order to prevent the idea that this is spoken in a mere figurative sense, in the Catechism it is distinctly declared, that "the Body and Blood of Christ are *verily* and *indeed*" — words cannot be stronger — "taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper."

THE DISCIPLE.

The words are very explicit; but as our Lord often speaks of Himself avowedly in a figurative sense—for instance, when He says that He is the Door, He is the true Vine—on what authority does the Church declare that the consecrated elements are *verily* and *indeed*, consequently in reality and not in figure, our Lord's Body and Blood?

THE MASTER.

Whatever does not admit of proof must be taken on authority; and I think I can show

that of this authority we have sufficient when we speak of the Real Presence of our Lord in the blessed Sacrament.

THE DISCIPLE.

But was not the doctrine of the Real Presence condemned by our Reformers as unscriptural and erroneous?

THE MASTER.

It was not against the doctrine of the Real Presence, but against the way in which the Presence was defined, that the Reformers protested. On this mysterious subject there were differences among the Reformers then, as there is among members of the Church now; but the teaching of the Prayer Book shows that, without defining too closely what is indeed incapable of definition, it is the doctrine of the early Fathers, in opposition to later innovations, that our Church maintains.

THE DISCIPLE.

Yet the mode in which this doctrine is to be received appears to me to be defined in the XXVIIIth Article, where it is stated that "the

Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten only after a heavenly and spiritual manner," and that "the mean whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is Faith."

THE MASTER.

This definition, as far as it goes, is meant to guard against the errors between which our Church takes a central position; on the one hand, that the "Presence" is, as Rome declares, a material and corporeal one, by a change of substance, in which the consecrated elements retain only what are called the accidents, or outward appearance of bread and wine; and on the other, where our Saviour's words are resolved into mere figure, peculiar grace being conveyed by the holy ordinance, and nothing more. In our Church there yet remains this further difference of opinion. While both admit that Christ's Body and Blood are received, one party holds that they are only such in efficacy and power *subjectively*, within the heart of the recipient; the other, that the elements become by consecration what they profess to be, *objectively*, in a mystical, sacramental, and supernatural sense, efficaciously to them who receive

faithfully, to the condemnation, as the Scripture declares, of those who receive unworthily. This latter view I believe to be most in accordance with the authority to which the Church refers, namely, Catholic Antiquity.

THE DISCIPLE.

Can you give me some of the authorities to which you refer?

THE MASTER.

I will quote but one or two out of the many that might be brought forward. St. Ignatius, consecrated Bishop of Antioch by St. Peter, says of the Docetæ, who did not believe in the reality of our Lord's Body, "They confess not that the Eucharist is the Flesh of our Saviour Jesus Christ which suffered for our sins, which the Father in His mercy raised again." St. Ambrose, Bishop of Milan in the fourth century, commences his sacramental prayer thus, "O great High Priest, who didst offer Thyself to God the Father, a pure and spotless victim, upon the Altar of the Cross, for us miserable sinners, and didst give us Thy Flesh to eat and Thy Blood to drink, and didst ordain that mys-

tery in the power of the Holy Spirit, saying, 'Do this in remembrance of Me.'" St. Irenæus, St. Augustine, and others are equally explicit.

THE DISCIPLE.

There is no denying that these great authorities speak distinctly, and bring the weight of their explanation to our Blessed Lord's words, "I am the living Bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this Bread, he shall live for ever: and the Bread which I will give is My Flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." And again, "He that eateth My Flesh, and drinketh my Blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him ¹."

THE MASTER.

It is certainly difficult to understand how declarations so clear as these can be evaded. But we know that they were a stumbling-block to some of the disciples, as they have been to many others since. But further evidence may be found in the foreshadowing which the older Scriptures afford. It may be held as a rule that the antitype exceeds the type, as the greater

¹ John vi. 51—56.

exceeds the less. Just take that of Melchizedek, "The king of peace, the priest of the Most High God, brought forth bread and wine, and blessed Abram²." An evident type of the Eucharist, since our Lord "is a Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek³." But see how far the type falls short of the Antitype. Again, when Abraham went forth to slay Isaac, the great type of the Father offering His Son, Isaac was rescued, and a lamb slain in his place : whereas our Blessed Saviour Himself suffered death on the cross "for us men and for our salvation." Here, again, the Antitype far exceeded the type. But when, at the Jewish Passover, the Paschal Lamb, the figure of the true Paschal Lamb, was not only slain but eaten, how inferior would the Antitype be to the type, if His Body was not likewise eaten at the Christian Passover, the Eucharistic Feast ! These things were written for our instruction, and as such I would exhort thee to consider them.

THE DISCIPLE.

I see the force of the arguments thou hast produced as regards the reality of the eating

² Gen. xiv. 18.

³ Heb. vi. 21.

and drinking our Lord's Body and Blood : may I have grace firmly to embrace the truth as thou hast explained it. But there is one point more, on which I should be glad of further instruction. In constituting this holy ordinance, our Lord says, "Do this in remembrance of Me;" and these words are not only repeated by the priest on delivering the sacred elements to the communicants, but, in the previous prayer of consecration, our Lord is addressed as having "instituted, and commanded us to continue, a perpetual memory of that His precious death, until His coming again." This might imply a mere commemoration to be perpetually observed, as we might commemorate any other great event; but the Eucharist must comprise something more than this.

THE MASTER.

The word "memory" would be more correctly given as "memorial;" and you are right in thinking that a far deeper meaning is implied than might at first sight appear. The full explanation will be found in what I believe to be the consentient voice of Catholic antiquity. By memorial is meant the commemorative sacrifice,

the constant memorial of the one great Sacrifice of the Cross, the offering of bread and wine first foreshadowed, as stated above, in that of Melchizedek, and afterwards foretold by the prophet Malachi, as the pure offering to be offered up by the Gentiles when God's name shall be great among them "from the rising of the sun to the going down of the same".⁴

THE DISCIPLE.

Thou speakest of the commemorative sacrifice, the pure offering of bread and wine, the promise of the spread and continuance of Christ's kingdom; but what peculiar benefit do I derive from partaking in this communion of "His Body and Blood," this perpetual memorial of His Death and Passion, more than by constant and earnest prayer, either with the congregation or in private?

THE MASTER.

This question may be answered by a clearer appreciation of the effect of the Incarnation upon our spiritual life. It is not unusual to consider the Atonement, that is, the reconcilia-

⁴ Mal. i. 11.

tion between God and man, as the main object of our Lord's coming on earth: but it went beyond this. To reconcile sinful man to his offended God was doubtless the primary purpose of our Saviour's mission; the ulterior design was to raise our fallen humanity into fellowship with His glorified humanity. We were not only to be saved from destruction, and to gain admittance to an eternal inheritance, but we were to be restored, and more than restored, to the likeness we had lost by Adam's transgression; and the two sacraments were to be not merely signs and symbols, but, if I may so say, the charters of our admission into this new covenant. In Baptism we are not only cleansed from inherited sin, but the water in which we are washed is the emblem of life both in the Old and New Testament, as the blood shed at the sacrifices, and now drunk mystically at the Eucharist, is the type or representation of that poured out on the cross. Hence the water and blood that issued from the wounded side of our Blessed Lord at the crucifixion are emblems of what the sacraments effect for us. They bring us into immediate access to God by means the first of which is done for us, the latter by us.

If the new birth, of which we are mere passive recipients, be ripened and matured in advancing years; if we partake of Holy Communion in the spirit of faith and obedience, which can alone render it efficacious,—we are brought, as the Prayer Book tells us, into special fellowship with our Blessed Redeemer; “We spiritually eat the Flesh of Christ, and drink His Blood; then we dwell in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us.”

THE DISCIPLE.

This all-important truth is plainly laid down; and yet, my Master, I cannot clearly see how this intimate union can take place between two, so unequal as the creature and the Creator, God and man.

THE MASTER.

You must remember that this union between God and man is a mystery, which we are called upon to believe, but not to attempt to fathom. Thus much, however, we know, that this conformity to His image begun here will be perfected hereafter. But as our Blessed Lord in taking upon Himself our nature bore its penalties and pains in their full force, so must we be

prepared to realize our likeness to Him in much patient endurance, often heavy indeed to be borne with all the help we can obtain. This help is sought in prayer; but prayer can only take us to God's footstool, while, as I have said above, the eating His Body and drinking His Blood open the door, as the Prayer Book states, to closer communion with Him. It is true, to the very best, this union during their earthly pilgrimage can be but imperfect. By faithful continuance, however, in well doing it will be fully realized in a future state. And this is what St. Peter implies when he says, that through means of "the exceeding great and precious promises we might be partakers of the Divine nature⁵." Our humanity, in some wonderful manner, will be rendered conformable to His glorified humanity. But this must begin now; and at the final restoration, when our bodies and souls shall be reunited, we shall be invested with bodies bearing resemblance in their degree to His glorious Body, to dwell with the assembly of blessed angels and spirits made perfect in His immediate presence for evermore.

⁵ 2 Pet. i. 4.

THE DISCIPLE.

I understand now how the blessed Eucharist affects the partakers of it individually; and I think, too, that I comprehend the nature and efficacy of the commemorative sacrifice. It by no means interferes with the sacrifice which our Saviour offered on the cross as a perfect and sufficient sacrifice for the sins of the whole world, which was finished once for all, and can never be repeated. But the priest, acting by immediate commission, presents the oblation of bread and wine as a commemorative rite to God, to be returned to the faithful communicant as Christ's Body and Blood.

THE MASTER.

Even so. But you must further comprehend that this conformity to our Blessed Lord is for the most part of slow and painful growth. From their manifold infirmities and still inherent corruptions the life of the most advanced continues a struggle both within and from without. The union, however, is still maintained; and when the fight is over, and the end comes, we may humbly hope for the palm of victory as our exceeding great reward.

THE DISCIPLE.

This is indeed, my Master, a blessed consummation! God grant we be all admitted to it! How great the loss to such as cannot realize it!

THE MASTER.

It is indeed most important to arrive at truth in a matter of such vital concern; and I have accordingly put before thee what I myself have received, and that, as I believe, on the most reliable authority. But it may be well, if as thou mayest have opportunity, thou shouldst study the works of those who from time to time, most earnestly engaged in the inquiry. Thou mayest then perceive the grounds upon which the controversies rested which have so much disturbed the peace of the Church, and thou wilt thus be able better to maintain the truth as thou receivest it, when thou mayest have occasion to do so. But since there is such difference even in our own communion, not so much regarding the nature as the mode of operation in the Eucharist, I would have you distinctly bear in mind that infallibility is granted to no man. The Scriptures alone contain the

inspired word of God. None since the Apostles and the sacred writers have been guaranteed from error. You may have sought what you believe to be the surest way to arrive at the right interpretation. In the Eucharist you may firmly adhere to the conviction, that sacramental grace is the chief medium for carrying on the divine life; that through it you enter into union with our Blessed Lord Himself; and that, in embracing this doctrine, you are following the more excellent way. Uphold your opinions decidedly and distinctly when called upon to do so; but never allow yourself to assume a dogmatic tone, or to enter into contentious disputation. On the contrary, endeavour to meet those with whom you differ rather with a desire to come closer to your opponent, if possible, by mutual explanation, than, as is too often the case, by vehemence in supporting your own opinions aggravate the points of dissidence. Half the questions on which earnest men disagree might be reconciled by a clearer definition of terms, accompanied by Christian candour and forbearance; and it is sad to see how much bitterness and strife are engendered by pressing opinions on points

which can only be solved by a future revelation. Not that truth and error are indifferent in the eyes of God; but it may be a reason for His allowing such diversities to exist among those equally anxious for Divine light, that the infirmity of man prevents him holding truth in a just balance. Anxious and eager minds will always be rushing into extremes; and hence the proportions of Christian doctrine may, perhaps, best be kept by the variety of views which present themselves to each according to his spiritual perception. I exhort, therefore, the utmost tolerance towards those who differ from us, not only from motives of Christian charity and forbearance, but from a desire to bring conflicting opinions together, as far as can be done, by mutual explanation. Even where our convictions may not fully accord, why may not the spirit still exist which called out of old the remark of the heathen, "See how these Christians love one another"?

CHAPTER VIII.

"WHOSOEVER SHALL EAT THIS BREAD, AND DRINK THIS CUP OF THE LORD, UNWORTHILY, SHALL BE GUILTY OF THE BODY AND BLOOD OF THE LORD. BUT LET A MAN EXAMINE HIMSELF, AND SO LET HIM EAT OF THAT BREAD, AND DRINK OF THAT CUP. FOR HE THAT EATETH AND DRINKETH UNWORTHILY, EATETH AND DRINKETH DAMNATION TO HIMSELF, NOT DISCERNING THE LORD'S BODY. FOR THIS CAUSE MANY ARE WEAK AND SICKLY AMONG YOU, AND MANY SLEEP. FOR IF WE WOULD JUDGE OURSELVES, WE SHOULD NOT BE JUDGED."—1 Cor. xi. 27—31.

THE DISCIPLE.

THOU hast explained to me, my Master, the nature of this Blessed Sacrament; how our Lord's presence in 'it is certified by the types and shadows of the Old Testament, and by the consentient voice of antiquity; that it is the appointed means through which our spiritual regeneration is effectively carried on, and that a frequent participation is necessary if I hope to

attain the final and glorious object of my aspirations, union with my Incarnate God and Saviour; but then come these awful words. Who can eat the Lord's Body and drink His Blood worthily? Who can stand before Him and say, "I am worthy of Thy salvation"? I cannot. It is in deep sense of my own unworthiness that I can venture to draw near, and when I kneel before the altar what can my lips utter but "Unclean, unclean"?

THE MASTER.

Every penitent heart, every stricken spirit, must feel as thou feelest; and assuredly it is in this frame of mind thou art fittest to appear before thy Saviour and thy God. It is right and necessary that thou shouldst be afraid of incurring the risk of eating His Body and of drinking His Blood unworthily; but thou must understand what is therein meant before thou allow this to be a reason against partaking of Holy Communion.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know if I neglect the solemn call to the Lord's table, I refuse the spiritual food pro-

vided for me. Yet to eat and drink my own condemnation appears the more fearful alternative. Better pine and languish than daringly profane. Better shun His presence altogether than seek it in a way which must meet with His displeasure.

THE MASTER.

I respect thy scruples, and were thou reduced to this, had thou no choice between appearing at the altar holy and sanctified, or in a state which would but increase thy sinfulness, in keeping away thou mightest choose the safer part. But feeling thine own unworthiness is not partaking of the Holy Eucharist unworthily. The very contrary is the case. The more conscious thou art of inherent evil, the more ready is our Blessed Lord to pardon. The more humbly thou comest into His presence, the more lovingly art thou received. And when thou smitest upon thy breast, and sayest, from the depth of a wounded spirit, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," His precious Body and Blood are pledges that thy prayer is heard, and that thou wilt go away justified, pardoned, and comforted.

THE DISCIPLE.

Blessed words indeed, my Master. But how then incur the danger against which such solemn warning is given?

THE MASTER.

At the time St. Paul wrote to the Corinthians the Eucharist usually followed the Love Feast, and was, in consequence, often grievously profaned; and though this was afterwards altered, the Sacrament has since been too frequently abused to render the Apostle's warning unnecessary. Approached in levity or carelessness, or mere formality, how could He, who has promised to be one with the faithful recipient, feel otherwise than despised? The eating and drinking unworthily consists in not discerning the Lord's Body. Well, therefore, must thou dread such awful profanation.

THE DISCIPLE.

Assuredly I have never partaken of this holy ordinance in the state of mind thou hast described, but my faith is weak, my devotion cold, my thoughts often wandering and per-

plexed, and the good resolutions I may have formed are but too soon forgotten. I cannot therefore but feel I am risking the Divine displeasure, though not to the extent of incurring the threatened condemnation.

THE MASTER.

What thou feelest is but too common ; but fear not, it is not from such our merciful Saviour averts His face. The devil is ever at hand to obstruct, as far as he is able, the approach of the sinner to the throne of grace ; but He who is with thee is stronger than he who is against thee, so take courage, and fear not.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know that my Blessed Lord is mighty to defend, and did the attack come only from the adversary without, I could feel that I were safe. But, as I have complained to thee before, there is treachery within. My heart is weak, nay more than weak. Too often does it open the door to temptation, and when I think that I am devoting myself to the service of God, it lets in a tide of evil imaginations which disturb and distract, if they do not actually divert, the cur-

rent of my thoughts. Again, if I escape these snares which the devil and my own heart present; if my prayer ascend freely, my conviction of sin be deep, and my penitence sincere; when I frame, in all earnestness, purposes of amendment, and do "truly intend to lead a new life, following the commandments of God, and walking from henceforth in His holy ways,"—sad experience teaches me that such impressions do not last, and that when I again approach the Lord's table, I shall have the same confessions to make, the same sins to deplore, without any marked sign of amendment. Is not this to provoke God's wrathful indignation, and to grieve the Holy Spirit? Have I not too much reason to fear lest, like the Jews of old, "my harvest is passing, my summer ending, and that I shall not be saved¹"?

THE MASTER.

It might be so were there not One Who watches over thee, and loves thee as thou never lovedst thyself. Our Blessed Redeemer came on earth to "bear thy griefs and to carry thy sorrows;" and having "Himself suffered being

¹ Jer. viii. 20.

tempted, He is able to succour them that are tempted²." Thy case is disheartening, and the comfort thou wouldst derive from partaking of the Holy Sacrament is indeed greatly marred, when thou fearest that the impression will be but temporary. But if thou persevere, it will not be in vain. The temptations under which you suffer will gradually relax; the evil habits you confess will lose their hold; and though the conflict will be long, and thou be often baffled, the whole armour of God will fit thee closer and closer, and thou mayest eventually hope to appear justified and pardoned before the judgment-seat. But this will not be accomplished without constant and diligent self-examination. Thou must test closely thy conduct before thou canst discover thy misdoings, and look well into thy heart if thou desire to become thoroughly acquainted with its workings.

THE DISCIPLE.

I have ever practised self-examination. Every night do I seek to inquire how the day has been passed; and a closer examination before partaking of Holy Communion makes me, I trust,

² Heb. ii. 18.

not altogether ignorant as to myself. But this is but imperfectly done, and I fear lest my conscience be rather lulled than my heart purified.

THE MASTER.

A careless and perfunctory performance of the duty of self-examination is a snare against which I cannot too earnestly caution thee. It is one of the devices of the devil to keep thee farthest from thy God when thou thinkest thou art in His more immediate presence. Many are so far gone in sin that their inward sense is hardened, and these the devil finds no difficulty in retaining. But the irresolute—those who have one eye on earth when they endeavour to fix their sight on heaven ; who obey the duty of attending at the altar, while their hearts are elsewhere,—these are the souls which the great adversary is mainly engaged in ensnaring, who are following the road to perdition, while they vainly think they are in the right path. But thou art not one of them. Thou still holdest Him by the hand, though thy grasp be feeble, and though thou stumble in thy course. He will preserve thee, that thou do not greatly fall. But thou must

devote thyself to a more strict and intimate self-inspection, if thou hope to arrive in safety at the end.

THE DISCIPLE.

I know, my Master, that I must keep my heart in all diligence and watchfulness. Direct me, then, how I may best do so to secure from backsliding, and thus may gain some little confidence in my progress.

THE MASTER.

Thou hast complained of thy want of resolution and decision. This must be overcome, or at least must be diligently struggled against, for without earnestness of purpose no good can come. There are two wills striving within thee for the mastery. In the natural man the carnal will for the most part prevails undisputed, but in the effectually regenerate heart the spiritual will comes into competition, and in the degree in which the one or the other predominates is the advance of the Christian life. Nor is a duality of will found only in our fallen nature. Our Blessed Lord, when He took our humanity upon Him, took likewise a human will. But this was always in subjection to the Divine, as

when in His agony He exclaimed, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me," He immediately added, "Nevertheless not as I will" (as man), "but as Thou wilt" (as God). And in this, as in all other things, He is our example. Strive to bring the carnal into subordination to the spiritual, and then there will be no double-mindedness. Thy contrition will be sincere, thy self-resignation real. It is thus thou mayest approach God's all-seeing eye in a fit state for effective self-inspection. Thou wilt be able to open thy heart freely before Him "to Whom all desires are known, and from Whom no secrets are hid." But it is not enough that thou callest thyself every night to account for the manner in which the day has been spent. This is well, but the examination to which you are exhorted before partaking of Holy Communion must be more deep and searching. The time to be thus occupied will depend upon the frequency of thy attendance. If constant, less time need be employed, for thou wilt live more in a state of habitual preparation. But if, from unavoidable circumstances, thou canst only do so at intervals, thou must seek opportunity

* Matt. xxvi. 39.

of retirement, and then open thy heart before Him Who alone can supply its necessities without stint or measure.

THE DISCIPLE.

But are there any rules I can follow at these stated periods of self-examination ?

THE MASTER.

There are many manuals for direction, almost any one of which may be used with profit. But I would, in the first place, recommend the two Tables of the Decalogue. Thy duty towards God, and thy duty towards thy neighbour will, indeed, open a wide field for inquiry. But beware of entering into the temple of the Lord, the recesses of thine own heart, as did the Pharisee. Test not thy obedience by the letter. It is the spirit, the inmost motive, the secret springs of action ; it is here thou must fix thy piercing scrutiny. It is assuredly not how thou mayest stand in the eyes of man, nor even to thine own superficial self-inspection. Thou must probe to the very bottom. The heart is deceitful ; the world can put on a fair disguise, and the flesh present plausible excuse for self-

indulgence. But thou must look thy own condition fairly in the face, and not allow delusion to blind or hinder thee. To obtain a thorough insight into thyself, so as to qualify thee to kneel at the altar, and to partake of the full benefit of Christ's Body and Blood, thou must come as thou art, poor and naked, and miserable, with nothing to offer but thy heart, in deep humility and contrition. Upon the griefs of thy troubled spirit He will look with compassion, and, like the good Samaritan, will pour healing balm into thy wounds. Nor must thou be content with confession of sin generally. Thou must examine thyself in a special manner with reference to the circumstances of thy position. In prosperity, or in poverty; in health, or sickness; in sorrow, or joy; in seclusion, or in the midst of public cares and occupations,—each state has its own peculiar trials and temptations. The whole creation groans, we are told, from the effects of the Fall. If the heathen suffer so much from sin, how fearful the responsibility of those who are under the Christian dispensation yet reject their Christian privileges, and sin on in bold defiance. How indispensably necessary to probe to the very

bottom, and to present the heart naked before Him.

THE DISCIPLE.

I do desire to examine myself thoroughly and earnestly, yet a drowsiness of soul will at times creep over me, and knowing as I do that such torpor may be the prelude of death, I do desire in all sincerity to keep the words of the Apostle ever before me, "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light⁴."

THE MASTER.

This vigilance is necessary, and never more so than when thy actions do not present any glaring character of evil. But when guilt assumes a deeper dye, or doubts of a distracting nature oppress and darken the spirit, the Church, with her usual wisdom and tenderness, directs that "some learned and discreet minister should be applied to, that by the ministry of God's holy Word he may receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice, to the quieting of his conscience, and avoiding all scruple and doubtfulness."

⁴ Eph. v. 14.

THE DISCIPLE.

Such counsel and advice must often come to the sore-smitten conscience as a breath from heaven, and, through God's mercy, the number of learned and discreet ministers on all points qualified to administer them is daily on the increase, And on entering on the thorny paths of life, how many of the young might be prevented from a course of sin, and how many troubles and sorrows averted in after life, had there been a friend at hand whose counsel they could have sought with confidence and respect !

THE MASTER.

Not a few might indeed have thus been preserved from shipwreck ; and to have a shining light before our eyes, by whose example to guide our steps, is at all ages a boon that cannot be over-estimated. But even here we must be on our guard against raising up to ourselves any standard of superhuman perfection. The most gifted among men possess not every excellence. Each forms a joint in the body corporate. Never was there but One example of entire completeness, and all have their own special grace to

mature after this perfect model. But as the habitual contemplation of the beauties of nature refines the taste and elevates the mind, to have the pattern before us of one who takes a high walk in his Christian calling, exalts and purifies, and gives energy to our spiritual perceptions.

CHAPTER IX.

“EXAMINE ME, O LORD, AND PROVE ME; TRY OUT MY
REINS AND MY HEART.”—*Ps.* xxvi. 2.

THE DISCIPLE.

THE tone of the inspired writer in thus applying to God to examine and prove him, is that of self-confidence I dare not use. How invite Him to try my reins and my heart when I am conscious how much of evil He must find?

THE MASTER.

The whole Psalm is prophetic, and its language only strictly applicable to One in Whom nought but innocency could be found, and Whose foot never wandered from the right way. But we must pray to the Holy Spirit to direct us in our self-inspection, for without His aid the depths of our hearts are quite unfathomable.

THE DISCIPLE.

In another place the holy Psalmist speaks quite differently, and here, indeed, I can quite go along with him. While praying to be kept from presumptuous sins, lest they get the dominion over him, he exclaims, as if in despair of being right before God, "Who can tell how oft he offendeth? O cleanse Thou me from my secret faults ¹."

THE MASTER.

It may, perhaps, be considered the sorest part of our earthly probation, that while we are seeking to walk with a conscience void of offence towards God, we are daily and hourly committing sins "more in number than the hairs of our head," if not altogether without knowledge, at least with such slight observation that we are quite unable to recount them. The very best must join in the confession, and pray for pardon for faults of which they are scarcely conscious.

¹ Ps. xix. 12.

THE DISCIPLE.

It is difficult enough, my Master, to keep a true account of the sins of omission and commission of which I am fully cognizant. My secret faults I must leave to His cleansing to Whose eyes alone they are patent.

THE MASTER.

And yet for the most part they are not so secret but by a close habitual watch they may, to a certain degree at least, be detected. To select a few cases in which it is difficult to distinguish the exact extent of our responsibility. We sin from infirmity; we sin from inward corruption; we sin even when seeking to do good, for zeal often runs into uncharitableness and self-will; and, when striving to be moderate, we become lukewarm and apathetic. Look also to the habits so often imperceptibly contracted; peculiarities from various causes which seem part of our very selves. Again, the difficulty of drawing a clear line in our ordinary conduct of what may be right and what merely allowable. Examples may be multiplied to infinitude where, though much may be done, as I

have said, by strict habitual watching, yet who can venture to say with confidence that he holds the balance true, and that the eyes of God are looking with perfect satisfaction upon him? Much is entering on the record, beyond what we are aware, that on the final day of account the very best will wish blotted out.

THE DISCIPLE.

Who indeed can tell how oft he offendeth? All I can hope for is that my secret faults may not from wilful neglect become presumptuous sins, and thus gain, and perhaps retain, dominion over me.

THE MASTER.

Thou hast ground for thy fears, but thou hast ground for confidence, too, in the guidance of Him Who is ever watching over you. But one of the ways in which we are all apt to offend, and that more often from inadvertence and want of care than from any conscious yielding to temptation, is our use or abuse of language. "I will take heed," says the Psalmist, "that I offend not with my tongue." This is a point, however, to which few pay sufficient attention.

THE DISCIPLE.

Scripture is indeed strong on this subject, and our Blessed Lord has Himself declared, "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned²."

THE MASTER.

Words are the index to the heart, and it is not too much to say, by the general tone of a man's language one is able to judge of his character. But it is not so much from habitual misuse proceeding from a corrupt source, as against the tendency so prevalent of neglecting to keep the tongue under due control, that I desire to warn you. Men swerve from truth without intending to deceive, and exaggerate and are insincere from mere want of consideration. There are conventionalities of speech which are so far harmless that no precise meaning is attached to them; but how often is the ninth commandment infringed from an idle habit of talking; and how rarely do we sufficiently remember what St. James so emphatically tells us, "that the tongue is an unruly member, full of deadly

² Matt. xii. 27.

poison³." I do not speak of those who spread evil reports by design, and maliciously bear false witness against their neighbour; but defamatory reports are repeated, not only unnecessarily, but without knowledge of their truth; and subjects and characters are made subjects of discussion, on which it would be far better to be silent. The misuse of words is, indeed, a secret fault against which we must pray to be cleansed.

THE DISCIPLE.

The same Apostle is urgent upon this point; for he over and over repeats the injunction, "If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, this man's religion is vain⁴." And again, "If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body⁵."

THE MASTER.

Thou canst not over-estimate the importance of observing the Psalmist's resolution, "I will take heed unto my ways, that I offend not with my tongue." It is, if I may use the expression, the devil's master-snare, and shows itself in the

³ James iii. 8.

⁴ James i. 26.

⁵ James iii. 2.

vast influence the use of language has among men. How, for instance, the marvellous gift of eloquence can mislead, when exerted in a wrong cause, and for a wrong end! How elevating and productive of good when exercised for a right purpose! How much of future reward or penalty will depend upon the way in which our faculty of speech has been employed! And it will be continued to all eternity. Hymns of praise and Hallelujahs in heaven; curses deep and never-ending in hell! Thou canst not, therefore, too carefully watch that in thine unguarded moments nought of evil proceed out of thy mouth, and that "for every idle word thou wilt have to give account in the day of judgment." There is yet, moreover, another point on which self-inspection is very necessary; namely, the due control of the thoughts.

THE DISCIPLE.

This is, indeed, my Master, a most painful and difficult duty; for even when my heart is, as I hope, set aright, and I have no lurking sin I wish to conceal, seeking to approach God in serious devotion, evil thoughts intrude with such force, that in my bewilderment I am led to

imagine my utterance but mockery, my prayers deceit.

THE MASTER.

The suggestions to which you allude are indeed grievous, and often come upon those who are most removed from temptation to do evil. Whatever shape, however, they assume, thou needst not be dismayed. Evil thoughts come from without, and are only sinful according as they meet acceptance. When the devil tempted our Lord in the wilderness, the God-man learnt what temptation meant; but the suggestions of Satan passed over Him innocuous, because, from the sinlessness of His humanity, they could find no admittance. This can never be our case on this side the grave; for, as the ninth Article declares, "This infection of nature doth remain; yea, even in them that are regenerated." Thou must always, therefore, be on the watch lest such suggestions meet response; and it is only as thou mayest advance towards such perfection as thou art capable of attaining, that evil thoughts, no less than evil desires, will fall harmless, like darts upon a coat of mail. The wild boar out of the forest will prowl about thee in vain, if thou do not open the door to his

approach ; but thou must never allow thyself to be off thy guard.

I have now said enough to point out how thou mayest not only be preserved from the dominion of presumptuous sins, but may likewise be cleansed from thy secret faults ; and my prayer is that my words, as far as they are in accordance with His holy will, "may be so grafted inwardly in our hearts," that they may tend "to bring forth the fruit of good living," both to him who has spoken and to him that has heard.

THE DISCIPLE.

May I, too, add in the words of the Psalmist, "The testimonies that Thou hast commanded are exceeding righteous and true⁶." "Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe : yea, my delight shall be ever in Thy statutes⁷."

⁶ Ps. cxix. 138.

⁷ Ibid. 117.

CHAPTER X.

**"CEASE, MY SON, TO HEAR THE INSTRUCTION WHICH
CAUSETH TO ERR FROM THE WORDS OF KNOWLEDGE."
—Prov. xix. 27.**

THE DISCIPLE.

THOU hast exhorted me, my Master, to meet those with whom I differ on doctrinal questions in a tolerant and loving spirit, yet there are some to whom I should find it difficult to hold out the hand of Christian fellowship.

THE MASTER.

My advice only applies to those who acknowledge, with ourselves, the voice of Inspiration. Thus far we have the bond of a mutual faith. Deny that voice, and I consider the bond dissevered.

THE DISCIPLE.

Yet the question is often opened in a free and

bold manner by not a few who would indignantly deny that they were unbelievers. But they would re-shape Revelation according to what they consider a more liberal model, the received formula of the Catholic Faith being too narrow for their enlarged comprehensions.

THE MASTER.

Yes, the design of the Divine Author has, according to them, been cramped and confined by human ignorance and intolerance. But this is nothing new. Scripture has ever been carped at by unbelief, more or less avowed; and we know how the whole structure of society was shaken to its very foundations, throughout Europe, by the godless philosophy of the last century. The sceptic now takes a way less direct, perhaps, but not less sure, for undermining the Faith. One of the most prevalent modes at the present day is to raise up Christian morality at the expense of dogma. We are told, as is true, that love is the basis on which Christian morality must stand. But love having been so much interrupted by the vehemence of controversy, all dogma must be alike of mere human invention. It being impossible,

moreover, to arrive at truth without clearer evidence than we possess, it is intolerant and false to hold that the Church can have authority to impose a system of belief for universal reception; truth being such as may present itself to each without the possibility of any ulterior test. The consequence of course is that the Scriptures are subjected to severe criticism; every difficulty, real or imaginary, is ostentatiously brought forward, and only such portion admitted to be God's Word as recommends itself to "the verifying faculty," enlightened by philosophic inquiry. This is the shape in which Rationalism has appeared among us of late. That it strikes at the root of Revelation is obvious. God is brought to the bar of man's judgment. What this judgment may approve is accepted, what will not stand the test is rejected.

THE DISCIPLE.

The general extension of knowledge, especially scientific, has a natural tendency to promote intellectual self-sufficiency; and the effect, especially on the minds of the young, it is much to be feared, is spreading widely.

THE MASTER.

No period of life is exempt from the influence of teaching which exalts the capacity of the human intellect; and there are some minds so constituted, that speculation seems their natural element, and to keep in the beaten path an intolerable restraint. Moreover, there is something attractive in many of the promulgers of these new doctrines. They are not merely amiable, but religious, according to their views of religion; and the plausible manner in which they uphold their tenets too often appears convincing to the unsettled and superficial. It is this that makes them so dangerous; and it is not too much to say that the sophistries of the earlier sceptics, the doubting subtilties of Hume, and the blasphemies of Voltaire were, on the whole, less injurious to truth than the insidiousness of the modern school of rationalists.

THE DISCIPLE.

We are warned throughout Scripture against idolatry, and not without cause, for the idol of Reason is set up now scarcely less glaringly than the Goddess of Reason was placed as an

object of adoration on the altars of the Church during the heat of the French Revolution. In both cases has human nature been deified, and God deposed from His sovereignty.

THE MASTER.

This is literally being exemplified among us at the present time. After exhibiting various phases abroad, especially in Germany and France, Rationalism has appeared in two different shapes which would have startled even the heathen philosophers of old. In one case the Deity is resolved into an all-pervading influence, differing entirely from that of God, as it involves no personality. Thus, confounding the Creator with the creature, worship is offered to universal nature instead of to its Author. A shadowy and misty Pantheism supersedes the Triune God; the one ruling Spirit is degraded into an unsubstantial essence. The other case is yet more fantastic and visionary. The idea of God is altogether repudiated; faith, as a principle, is denied, and worship is paid to some visible human object. It might almost seem that infidelity had now reached its extremest bound of ab-

surdity, were not the arts of the devil inexhaustible.

THE DISCIPLE.

It is difficult to believe that the licentiousness of speculation can exceed the extravagances of the Pantheistic and Positivist theories. But how dreadful the thought that men should wantonly dare to throw off the blessed verities of the Christian faith, to embrace such vain and empty shadows!

THE MASTER.

It is, indeed, an awful consideration, that a creature so poor and impotent as man should venture thus to defy his Almighty Creator! Something might be said for those who, carried away by their passions, with unruly wills and unsubdued affections, try to shut their eyes against a God Whose favour they have forfeited. But what can be thought of such as so pervert the powers committed to them, that their chiefest boon, their intellectual faculties, they employ to affront and deny Him from Whom they have received them? Why came they into the world, if this world be all? Why distinguished from the brutes, if not for some

ulterior purpose? To what owe they their existence but to a Sovereign Will? Or, if they admit Christianity, in what is theirs superior to a mere system of morals, if the personality of Christ, in His double nature, is doubted or denied? If He lived not on earth, and died not on the cross—if He stand not before the Father as our Mediator and Redeemer—where shall we, sinners as we are, appear? If we may not love Him, Who so loved us, what resting-place for the affections are we conscious of possessing, since all around us, like ourselves, is passing away? If we cannot pray to Him with confidence, and He hear and answer our prayers, how meet the trials, the troubles, the disappointments of life? If there be no Holy Spirit to guide, support, and comfort us, how could we ever hope to present ourselves fitting objects for His adoption? Better be as the beasts that perish than profess Christianity without a personal, ever-present, ever-loving Christ. And as regards those who blasphemously deny or explain away the existence of God, “professing themselves to be wise, they do indeed become fools”—fools while on earth, how much more than fools when sent into eternal perdition!

They will then know that there is a God. He will not be denied hereafter, however rejected now. And what will gloomy Atheism have to offer then? What refuge, what hope, what blessing? They will return to their dust, but will all their thoughts perish? It were well for them if it thus could be.

THE DISCIPLE.

Pride and wilful blindness will doubtless be the cause—to how great a number!—of forfeiting their eternal inheritance. But there are many, also, who are involved in inextricable perplexity by the difficulties Revelation offers, and think to escape these difficulties only by rejecting Revelation altogether.

THE MASTER.

This may be so, and God is a merciful Judge; but allowing these difficulties, do their systems present fewer? They may try, if they please, to reduce the Bible to be a mere collection of legends; but will the book of nature be easier to read? They may discard the mystery of the Gospel as irrational, but do they find none in the ordinary course of life? Rest assured of

this, God will not allow His secrets to be pryed into by the mere light of unassisted reason; and the Atheist here may be more consistent than the Deist. It were better to act upon the conviction that the existing order of things proceeds from some fortuitous combination, than to admit a superintending, or at least an originating God, and then to define and limit His powers according to human device.

THE DISCIPLE.

We have noticed, though with many grand examples to the contrary, the effect the wide expansion of knowledge has upon the minds especially of those who devote themselves to the pursuit of any branch of science, in contracting and narrowing their spiritual perceptions. They are so dazzled by the light which opens around them, they can see nothing distinctly beyond.

THE MASTER.

The idolatry, as I have said before, to which human nature is so prone, and against which Scripture so constantly warns, looks inward with them. While the heathen worship wood and stone, or an earthly representation of some-

thing beyond which they cannot reach, the scientific philosopher too often forms his ideal of perfection upon the unlimited expansion of his intellectual faculties. Yet how much grander the sphere of mystery into which they cannot penetrate! Through the mists which surround it the enlightened Christian can see shadows, more or less distinct, of things far greater than mere human wisdom, in its widest stretch, could comprehend. Our existence begins in mystery, and, as far as this life is concerned, in mystery it must end. It is only in the next life the clouds will disappear, and even then we know not whether a veil may not cover the machinery wherewith the Mighty Artificer carries on the work of the universe. Be that however as it may, here we can but "see through a glass darkly;" and instead of our intellectual powers being perfected in their present state of existence, they are only ripening for something higher and better. And let man in his pride think what he will, this can only be done through the influence of God's Holy Spirit; and earthly knowledge, be it what it may, will but cramp and confine, unless it carry on to the divine, and press forward into the

region of faith. Let the philosopher speculate, the wise and learned expatiate; let them examine the heavens, and explore the earth, or devote themselves to unravel the intricacies of mental development,—it is of no use. There is a voice that says, “Thus far, and no farther.” One only star among the myriads in the firmament could lead the Eastern sages to the wished-for Presence; and there is but One Light still that can guide our steps to their destined end. Those who follow it not will only grope about more hopelessly, and prove, what the Preacher has taught, that all is vanity. But thy powers, whatever they be, are not to be hidden under a bushel. God has given them that they may be employed for wise and good purposes. Explore the heavens or the earth, open the storehouse of nature, investigate truth, devote thy attention to social objects, to the improvement of taste and extension of civilization; do this according to thy bent, and thou doest well. But remember there is something beyond, and that the fruit thou mayest gather, however fair it seem, thou wilt find at last to contain but dust and ashes, unless it be gathered from the Tree of Life.

CHAPTER XI.

"AND I WILL PRAY THE FATHER, AND HE SHALL GIVE YOU ANOTHER COMFORTER, THAT HE MAY ABIDE WITH YOU FOR EVER; EVEN THE SPIRIT OF TRUTH."—*John* xiv. 16.

THE MASTER.

THE voice of the Holy Spirit is about to address thee. Listen to His words with reverence and awe.

THE DISCIPLE.

Speak, Lord ; for Thy servant heareth.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

The beloved Son, thy Saviour and Redeemer, promised when about to leave the world, that another Comforter should be sent, even the Spirit of Truth, to dwell with His disciples for ever, and to be the Agent whereby they might

be joined to His manhood. Art thou conscious, as regards thyself, that this promise has been performed?

THE DISCIPLE.

“O Lord, Thou hast searched me out and known me. Thou knowest my down-sitting and my uprising, Thou understandest my thoughts long before¹.” “Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me; I cannot attain unto it².”

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

I attended thee, My son, at the font. I have watched over thee with an eye yet more careful than a parent's. From thy youth up even until now, when the devil has whispered temptations, I have ever sought to screen thee; when unhappily yielding thy steps have wandered, I have sought thee wistfully. Whatever good is in thee I put into thy heart. Every upward aspiration I awoke, and have cherished. And to crown the work, I have made of thee a temple in which to dwell, unless violently expelled by continued disobedience.

¹ Ps. cxxxix. 1.

² Ibid. 5.

THE DISCIPLE.

Yes, Blessed Spirit, I know that in my heart Thou wouldst find a temple. But oh, how defiled and unworthy of Thy presence! Evil spirits are always seeking admission, and often—how often!—do I parley with them.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

As long as thy life continues, these attacks will not cease. Other troubles, too, will come upon thee, but the Paraclete will ever be thy help and support. If thou do not desert from Him, He will never forsake thee.

THE DISCIPLE.

The trials and troubles of life are indeed difficult to bear; but grant that I may turn to Thee, the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, with unswerving confidence and trust.

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

Thy Saviour came on earth "a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." Thou too, My son, must have thy share, in whatever portion allotted. Thou must wend thy way

through the wilderness before thou cross the Jordan. The Land of Promise will not be reached till thou hast overcome the enemies which impede thy way. And thou must imitate His patience if thou hope to partake of His glory. From His Birth to His Ascension how patiently did He endure; what, as the Bearer of the Divine wrath, He was called upon to suffer! Patient through the period of childhood and youth; veiling His Divinity, and "increasing in wisdom and stature" even like an ordinary man! Then, throughout His whole mission, how patient with the slowness of heart and want of faith of His disciples! patient with the hypocrisy and malice of the Jewish leaders—patient in His agony—patient amidst the scoffs of the infuriated multitude—patient with His false accusers and unjust judges—patient in His scourging on the Cross, and in His death. And patiently doth He bear with those whom He hath called to be His own, their imperfect repentance and frequent relapses. In all to which thou mayest be exposed thou must follow His example. Patiently must thou take from God what He may see fit to inflict upon thee; patient with thy fellow-

creatures—patient even with thyself in all thy manifold infirmities; and if Christian charity be united to Christian patience, I will ever protect thee till the strife be over, and the battle won. “When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee³.” I am the Comforter now, and will carry thee through to the end.

THE MASTER.

Thou hast heard the words of the Holy Spirit; the rest depends upon thyself. Pray not only for patience and perseverance, but earnestly beseech Him Who has now spoken to thee, that thou mayest have “a right judgment in all things.” Stedfastly resolve never to listen to any charmer, however wisely he may appear to charm⁴, who would strive to divert thee from the beaten track of Revelation. If men will dispute, and doubt, and disbelieve, “What is that to thee?—follow thou Me.”

³ Isa. xliii. 2.

⁴ Ps. lviii. 5.

THE DISCIPLE.

Even so, my Master. "Make me, Blessed Spirit, ever to go in the way of Thy commandments; for therein is my desire." "My delight shall be in Thy statutes; and I will not forget Thy word⁵."

THE MASTER.

The Holy Spirit has addressed thee as the Comforter and Paraclete: He is likewise "the Spirit of Truth, Who guideth into all truth⁶." If thou trust, therefore, to Him, thou wilt never go astray. Moreover, in the Nicene Creed He is called "the Lord and Giver of Life." From the time that "the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters⁷," He has continued to animate all creation: and is in a special manner the source of spiritual life. He is, too, our Sanctifier, and from our new birth in baptism never ceases making intercession for us before the throne of grace "with groanings which cannot be uttered." Nor is that intercession unavailing, since "He that searcheth the heart knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because

⁵ Ps. cxix. 35. 167.⁶ John xvi. 13.⁷ Gen. i. 2.

He maketh intercession according to the will of God^s." Yet further, as the Church was instituted by the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, so has He continued to organize and preside over it.

THE DISCIPLE.

I believe in one Holy Catholic Church, and as a member of Christ am likewise a member of the Church; but I do not quite comprehend what this membership comprises.

THE MASTER.

Thou seest rightly that thou standest towards God in a double relationship, as an individual and as a member of the Church. These relationships are distinct, but inseparably united towards the formation of the Christian character. Thy individuality is derived from the first Adam; thy Church membership originates with the second Adam. By the one descent thou art born alone, live and die alone, and wilt appear alone to give thy final account. By the other thou art mystically incorporated into

^s Rom. viii. 26, 27.

Christ's Body, "a member of His flesh and of His bones⁹." At our baptism the two states are united; we are at the same time made individually members of Christ and members of the Christian community. The whole rests upon the fundamental doctrine of the Incarnation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us¹." Here, as regards us is the first and chiefest of mysteries: the mystery of our incorporation follows from it. It is commenced, as I said above, at the font: it is nourished at the altar; and it is through the agency of the life-giving Spirit that these holy ordinances become available towards rendering us partakers of them: "One with Him, and He with us." Thou seest, then, that while singly thou art made a member of Christ, it is in the corporate capacity as a member of the Church thou acquirest full right to thy spiritual inheritance. Let this be for thy comfort: and with reference to worship, thy private prayers may be chiefly offered for thyself and for those more immediately claiming thy intercession. The

⁹ Eph. v. 30. . .

¹ John i. 1. 14.

common prayer is for the whole body of the Church.

THE DISCIPLE.

But to render common prayer effectual, the whole body of the Church should be united; yet how miserably does she suffer from our unhappy divisions!

THE MASTER.

Never will the Church recover her full strength till these differences be healed, and the prayers of Christ's servants are offered up with one voice and from one heart. But Christians who are divided and separated from one another may yet be joined in Him. And with this we must patiently abide the time when the rents in His seamless garment be made whole. Meanwhile we may rejoice that there is an invisible Church where no such divisions exist, of those who are gone before, and are now anticipant of their coming glory. Of one thing, too, we may feel secure, God's mercies are unlimited. All who have laboured in His service in a loving spirit, trusting solely in the efficacy of the Atonement, whatever has been their mistake as to their mode of admission, will be received

at last, and not lose their reward. Christians, however they differ here, will, if true in heart and sincere in faith, meet eventually together before the throne of grace.

CHAPTER XII.

“FOR THE HOUR IS COMING, IN THE WHICH ALL THAT ARE IN THE GRAVES SHALL HEAR HIS VOICE, AND SHALL COME FORTH; THEY THAT HAVE DONE GOOD, UNTO THE RESURRECTION OF LIFE; AND THEY THAT HAVE DONE EVIL, UNTO THE RESURRECTION OF DAMNATION.”
—*John* v. 28, 29.

THE DISCIPLE.

THESE, my Master, are indeed awful words; but I know whatever our Blessed Lord hath vouchsafed to declare must come to pass. To not a few, however, they are a stumbling-block. Can any sin, say they, committed by man during his short residence on earth merit an eternity of punishment? Can a God of mercy and justice have called a number of human beings into existence for such a fearful doom as this? The word “ever” must surely be taken in a restricted sense in this as in other

places in Scripture; in Jeremiah, for instance, where it is stated that "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not want a man to stand before Me for *ever*¹."

THE MASTER.

It is too true that Omniscience has been arraigned before the bar of human judgment, and condemned either as unjust and cruel, or else as stating what He did not mean. Art thou of the number of the impugners?

THE DISCIPLE.

God forbid that I should for a moment question either His justice or His truth! Yet it is difficult for a man living among his fellows fully to estimate transgression which can deserve such a tremendous doom.

THE MASTER.

All God's dealings with humanity are difficult for humanity rightly to comprehend. Look them well in the face, and then say what thy understanding can fully grasp. Though not the Author of evil, yet God permits it.

¹ Jer. xxxv. 19.

Canst thou give the reason why Omnipotence should allow the existence of what It loathes and detests? Canst thou explain why it was necessary that Christ should become man, in order to counteract the works of the devil, whom, as God, He could annihilate in a moment? Canst thou see the justice of the innocent suffering for the guilty; the nature and extent of vicarious Atonement? "God's love is over all His works." Canst thou reconcile this love with His bringing multitudes into the world, whose inheritance He foresees will be death, and not life? Let man boast as he will, there is no reserve, no alternative between atheism and simple belief. If God's Word is not received as He has given it, He is rejected altogether. He knows nothing of a questioning faith. Whether gainsaid or no, in it is thus written. Over and over is the same declaration made, "And these" (the cursed) "shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal²." In the Greek the word *αἰώνιος* is applied to both. Though somewhat differing in the translation, the meaning is the same. If the punishment be not for ever,

² Matt. xxv. 46.

neither will the life. Art thou prepared for this solution?

THE DISCIPLE.

No, my Master; let the Universalist, as he is pleased to call himself, theorize as he may, Hell can never be made a preparation for Heaven. The only alternative is eventual annihilation; and if the Word eternal can be thus explained away, what security is there that the righteous will not equally suffer annihilation? And who could bear the thought? If in God's unerring justice the eternity of Hell rests on the same basis as the eternity of Heaven, as seems to me indisputable, no doubt shall ever rest on my mind. Shall not the Lord of all the earth do right?

THE MASTER.

We see now through a darkened glass. Our eyes are too dim, our mental grasp too limited, to comprehend more than has been revealed. Thus much, however, we are assured, that though men will be judged by perfect justice, that justice will be tempered with perfect mercy. The accuser, we are told, will stand before the

judgment-seat; but He that sitteth thereon will be no less our Advocate than our Judge. If we have rejected Him, and present ourselves impenitent before His tribunal, He assuredly will reject us; but if we have come to Him in faith, humbly confessing our sins before it be too late, He will receive us as His own, to be placed among the sheep on His right hand.

THE DISCIPLE.

Thou hast said that as we live and die alone, so we shall appear singly before the judgment-seat of Christ; but if we shall be reunited, and recognize in the disembodied state those whom we have loved here, the connexion surely has not entirely ceased now. Am I not, then, at liberty to offer up my poor prayer for the departed, that we may meet before the throne of Grace, where their bliss, as well as ours, we hope may be perfected?

THE MASTER.

In the first Reformed Liturgy, the Prayer for "the Whole State of Christ's Church," which was superseded in the second Liturgy by the Prayer now in use, is thus beautifully worded.

After commemorating Holy Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, and Martyrs, the Prayer continues, "We commend unto Thy mercy, O Lord, all other Thy servants which are departed hence from us, with the sign of faith, and do now rest in the sleep of peace. Grant unto them, we beseech Thee, Thy mercy and everlasting peace; and that at the day of the general Resurrection we, and all they which be of the mystical Body of Thy Son, may altogether be set on His right hand, and hear that His most joyful voice, 'Come unto Me, O ye that be blessed of My Father, and possess the kingdom which is prepared for you from the beginning of the world.' Grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate." The reasons for the alteration in the second Liturgy I need not now enter upon. But the Church tribunal has, nevertheless, decided that prayer for the dead is not unlawful³; and it is well that so it be. It is certainly more Catholic to pray for "the whole state of Christ's Church" than to limit our

³ Sir Herbert Jenner decided in the case *Breeks v. Woolfrey*, that prayers for the dead have not been forbidden by the Church of England.

prayer to "the Church militant here in earth." Commemoration of the dead is found in the four early Liturgies; and had the compilers of the second Book of Common Prayer intended to condemn the practice, they would have infringed the rule by which the Anglican Reformation was framed, adherence to the teaching of Catholic antiquity. I should indeed be loth to think all connexion was lost between the living and the dead; and it would require higher authority than can be brought forward to make me forego the greatest comfort that can remain when earthly ties are dissolved.

THE DISCIPLE.

True, my Master; it would add greatly to the desolation of bereavement if, while intercession is commanded for those on earth, we were forbidden to pray for a blessed reunion with the loved ones no more seen among us. And how dreadful the thought, how many there are whom we daily meet who will be rejected at the last! Yet the bulk of mankind seem to err more from neglect and carelessness than from any deliberate wish to offend. Nay, there are some who appear to be leading exemplary lives, who are

yet regardless of the offered terms of salvation. Am I presumptuous, then, in asking whether there may not be gradations of punishment in Hell, as of reward in Heaven?

THE MASTER.

I repeat, that we can never in our present state fully comprehend the malignity of sin any more than we can embrace the depth and breadth of the work the Atonement has effected. How much sin exists under a fair disguise, and how far the meritorious intercession of our Saviour and Redeemer may prevail, we cannot know. But there is justice in the idea that, as there are various degrees of guilt, so there will be various gradations of punishment. Benevolence and amiability, though merely worldly, cannot stand in God's eyes in the same light as cruelty and daring wickedness. The withdrawal of the Divine countenance; endless remorse, bitter and deep, for the rejection of the proffered terms of redemption; the ceaseless gnawing within from the knowledge of what they are, compared with what they might have been,—all this may be the punishment allotted to some, while dreadful torments inappreciable await the more auda-

cious in guilt. Mercy will doubtless extend far more widely than we can imagine; but justice, perfect justice, must still prevail.

THE DISCIPLE.

But again: as to those who will be saved. The larger number of these may have led careless, or perhaps evil lives, and their hearts have been only touched by a late repentance. They may, indeed, be as brands snatched from the fire; yet unless a most sudden and miraculous change come over their souls when liberated from the body, though redeemed by faith in the atoning Blood of the Saviour, they must widely differ from those who have struggled, and fought, and suffered for the truth during the whole course of their lives. Eventually they will all alike be clothed with the righteousness of the Redeemer; but will not the white robes vary in lustre in some proportion to the condition in which death found them? I have been somewhat perplexed by the parable which says that the same award will be given to those who have been called at the eleventh hour, and to those who have borne the heat and burden of the day⁴.

⁴ Matt. xx. 12.

THE MASTER.

No perplexity need attach to the question thou hast put when rightly understood. One and "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God^s;" and therefore no one can be justified and accepted but through the alone merits of our Blessed Saviour and Redeemer. Here, then, all the redeemed stand on the same footing; all alike are saved by faith in His vicarious atonement. But there is this distinction; all who are saved will be rewarded according to their works. "He that has sown plenteously will reap plenteously, and he that has sown sparingly will reap sparingly." All the redeemed will receive their penny—their gift of salvation; but those who were called earliest in their childhood to the vineyard may not have been the most careful and assiduous; or those who were gifted with the greatest advantages may not have made the best use of them. But all, at whatever hour they may be called, will receive at God's hands what is right. And thus some who appear to be first may by Him Who reads the heart be accounted among the last,

^s Rom. iii. 23.

and those least apparent may be reckoned among the first.

THE DISCIPLE.

But as there will be various stations in the kingdom of Heaven, there must be various dispositions and qualifications; and to these men appear to be appointed by God's absolute decree.

THE MASTER.

God's decree is absolute only as to the calling; to obey or neglect that calling is left to free will. And glory through all eternity will be proportionate. Indeed, for those who have suffered martyrdom for Christ's sake—and how many there may be of such to God's all-seeing eye who can tell?—there is a special place even now reserved; for we are told in the Apocalypse that, on the opening of the Fifth Seal, the blessed Evangelist saw “under the altar the souls of those who were slain for the Word of God, and for the testimony which they held⁶.”

THE DISCIPLE.

They who have endured much tribulation

⁶ Rev. vi. 9.

and had their robes washed in the Blood of the Lamb seem thus to be reserved in a special manner by God's holy keeping. But have we any information as to those who are daily and hourly passing away, without any peculiar mark, as far as we know, either of good or evil?

THE MASTER.

As regards the state of the disembodied spirit generally, Scripture tells but little. In the parable of Dives and Lazarus we are informed that the righteous are at rest, and that mutual recognition is allowed in Hades. And our Blessed Lord promised the penitent thief that he should be that day with Him in Paradise. We may come, then, to the conclusion that, while the souls of the righteous are in a state of peace and of blessed anticipation, the souls of the unredeemed are looking forward with terror and despair.

THE DISCIPLE.

In the Articles, the Doctrine of Purgatory, as was taught at the time of the Reformation, and still, I believe, is received by the Church of Rome, is condemned. But may we not yet

believe in some purifying process by which the souls of the redeemed may be gradually preparing for the purer and higher light they are eventually to enjoy, for which not a few are but little fitted when they leave the world?

THE MASTER.

The Doctrine of Purgatory is a mediæval development, with much addition and variation, from an opinion which generally prevailed in the early age of the Church, namely, that the souls, except of saints and martyrs, went through some course of purification in the intermediate state. But as no Scripture authority could be produced, I am not aware that it was ever made a prominent point of doctrine, still less an Article of Faith. The idea, however, is certainly reasonable, and may reconcile some of the difficulties which in this matter present themselves. There is a school of theology, indeed, which would consider any such process as inconsistent with, and derogatory to, the great work completed by our Blessed Saviour for us; and speaks of the emancipated spirit as proceeding at once to glory. Yet glory cannot be consummated till the reunion

of body and soul after the day of judgment. It may be that the Sun of Righteousness, though yet distant, may gradually dissipate the mists with which connexion with the body has enveloped the soul. It may be that keen regret at the time mispent, at the evil habits indulged in and opportunities neglected, more vivid from the knowledge of what sin is, may in some way have a purifying and sublimating influence, preparing the soul for its future destination. Indeed, I can scarce doubt that the transit once made, and freed from the entanglements of the flesh, the past will rise in tremendous awfulness before us. Acts good or evil, fruits matured or marred—all will appear with a distinctness overwhelming, but for the near presence of Him Who sought and saved us! And then the blessed thought that the soul which has passed out of the world pure and innocent, or deeply penitent for the soils it may have contracted, may be folded within the everlasting arms, like an infant nursling in its mother's bosom, till it be strengthened and fitted for the work it may have to perform when reunited to its glorified body. And whatever be our state, we shall all be safe! The devil has done his worst; he can

do no more. He has been foiled, and we are secure from his attacks for ever. Nor can the inward motions of sin again mislead us: all is rest—all is peace. Doubts and difficulties no more distress; disappointments and bereavements have ceased; tears, and sorrowing and sighing are done away. No fear now of Hell, or the second death. The battle has been fought, the victory won, and the soul rests in the hands of its Saviour and Redeemer, till it be called to fulfil its higher destiny in Heaven.

THE DISCIPLE.

High and comforting words, my Master, to them who can rightfully appropriate them! But of the generations that have passed, and are passing around me, where are they now? And for myself? Verily the wear and tear of life has told upon me! Would that I could now feel as I once did, when sensibly aroused by the voice of the Spirit. It seems as if all were dull and dead within me; and, though I strive to do my duty, I could almost fear that the accusation of that Spirit to the Ephesian Church would apply to myself: "I know thy works, and thy patience, and thy endurance;

nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love⁷." Yes, I could indeed fear that the doom were upon me, did I not feel in my inmost heart that, in spite of all my inconsistencies, my weariness and coldness, I could yet appeal, as did St. Peter, "Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee;" not with the warmth I so much desire, but with sincerity and truth.

⁷ Rev. ii. 2—4.

CHAPTER XIII.

“AND HE SPAKE TO THEM A PARABLE; BEHOLD THE FIG TREE, AND ALL THE TREES; WHEN THEY NOW SHOOT FORTH, YE SEE AND KNOW OF YOUR OWN SELVES THAT SUMMER IS NOW NIGH AT HAND. SO LIKEWISE YE, WHEN YE SEE THESE THINGS COME TO PASS, KNOW YE THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NIGH AT HAND.”—*Luke xxi. 29—31.*

THE DISCIPLE.

THOUGH our Blessed Lord was ever anxious to check any unnecessary curiosity in His followers, He nevertheless appears, just before His Passion, to have foretold the dreadful convulsions which were to precede His coming to judgment. In the Revelation we have still further disclosures as to what is to accompany the great final conflict; but the event seems to us so far off as to cause no disquiet. Things go on much as they always have, and the Church, though tossed about on the waves of this troublesome world,

still holds her course, though I own it requires a settled faith to bear in mind that the great Pilot is ever at the helm, and is keeping His promise to be with her even to the end.

THE MASTER.

Here is our security amid the signs and omens which seem to be gathering round. When the Prophet saw from the height of Carmel the cloud like a man's hand, it was the promise of returning prosperity. The clouds discernible now are rather the threatenings of approaching storm. We are forewarned in the wonderful Book of Revelation that the Church, in her last struggle before her final triumph, will have to encounter a trial far greater than she has had yet to endure in her conflict with the powers of evil. Persecution before unheard of will then await her. Numbers upon numbers will desert her; with the aggravation that, while at her first propagation her enemies were from without, not a few of her most envenomed foes will be apostates from within. I have always shrunk from attempting to expound this mysterious Book, since from the infinite discrepancies of those who have done so, I have come

to the belief that a sure clue to the solution has never been granted yet to man. A few points, however, seem clear, and among them the awful foretellings of what will take place in the latter days. Unless those days be shortened no flesh should be saved; but for the elect's sake the great Disposer hath shortened "the days." Mighty Babylon shall fall. The spirit of iniquity will be trodden under foot; and the victory gained, He will be seen in the clouds, "and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of Him¹."

THE DISCIPLE.

Fearful words, and most fearful the doom that awaits the rebellious nations of the earth. But what are the prognostics from which thou apprehendest that this dread consummation is near at hand?

THE MASTER.

I do not say that the end of all things is near at hand as men count nearness, for the times and seasons are known only to God. Moreover, we are told that the last day will

¹ Rev. i. 7.

come as a thief in the night, and take the rebellious world by surprise. Yet we are commanded to observe "the signs of the times²," and they appear to me to present an increasingly ominous aspect.

THE DISCIPLE.

Yet in many respects the aspect is cheering. The sphere of Christian charities seems enlarging, and there is certainly more zeal and earnestness in religion than there was at no distant period.

THE MASTER.

It is this that makes me consider "the signs" so portentous. As far as religion is concerned, the besom of destruction might, during the last century have swept over us with but little comparative opposition. In fact it did so over a large portion of the civilized world. But this was not to be the end. The cause of God was not to be thus surrendered. A mighty conflict between the principles of good and evil is yet to take place, and the forces on each side are preparing for it. Those indifferent before are taking their place now, and the battle will be

² Matt. xvi. 3.

fought out face to face. The Church of Christ is putting forth her powers. The faithful are becoming more faithful; the temporizers are gaining decision; the earnest increasing in zeal; and God's soldiers are, with more or less determination, buckling on their armour. On the other side, the careless are taking a firmer aspect of defiance; the open enemy is more declared in his hostility, and the devil and his angels are more actively and hopefully at work. Never did false philosophy more abound, nor was infidelity more insidious in its attacks on Revelation. Even Atheism, as I have said before, is putting on new and more monstrous forms. Then the young, we are told, are to be instructed in every thing rather than in the one thing needful. The intellect is to be stimulated, morals even cultivated, as increasing civilization demands; but Christianity as a system is denounced, or, at the best, is to be left to chance. Each, however inexperienced, is to form his own belief or unbelief, as he is at liberty to choose his ordinary occupation. Forms of faith are to be superseded by increased intelligence. Truth is to be to every one just what he chooses to accept. And, as a necessary prelude, the

Church, as a national institution, is discouraged, or, at the best, considered as a piece of State machinery. These, then, are the elements that are coming more and more into collision ; man regenerated by grace, with man in his natural corruption ; the powers of evil with the powers of good. And the former, we are foretold, will for a time prevail, till the Mighty Victor shall appear, "conquering and to conquer," and the final destruction of His enemies be accomplished. It is on this account I have been so constantly urging thee to be on thy guard. Never did the devil more put on the aspect of an angel of light than he is now doing, seducing so many to their ruin. No superstition is so blinding as the superstition of unbelief. The sceptic will doubt against the clearest evidence. Any thing, indeed, will be accepted but the revealed Word of God. But rest thou secure on the Rock of ages. Hold fast by the Hand which now supports and guides thee ; "for though heaven and earth shall pass away," His words of good to His friends, and evil to His enemies, "shall not pass away."

CHAPTER XIV.

"THOUGH I WALK THROUGH THE VALLEY OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH, I WILL FEAR NO EVIL ; FOR THOU ART WITH ME ; THY ROD AND THY STAFF COMFORT ME."—*Ps.* xxiii. 3.

THE DISCIPLE.

I BEGIN to realize to myself the approach of death more sensibly than hitherto. It may be that the decline of physical power brings spiritual things more vividly to my thoughts. Whatever be the cause, the separation of soul and body presents itself habitually to my imagination, even amid the ordinary concerns of every-day life.

THE MASTER.

It is not unnatural that such should be the case. But what effect does the thought pro-

duce? Is it soothing or alarming? animating or discouraging?

THE DISCIPLE.

I am unable fully to analyze the effects such impression makes. They appear much to vary. At one time awe, if not actual terror, prevails; at another, a calmer and more hopeful feeling. But at the best I cannot divest the future of fear. The transit from the seen to the unseen; the death-struggle, often so dreadful in its agony; the dim perception of what the grave will reveal; the awful meeting with my God; and the inward searching of His all-seeing eye,—how can this tremendous hour be contemplated, though it may not be close at hand, without appalling solemnity?

THE MASTER.

But do no rays of Divine love seem to penetrate through the mist? Art thou never able to take to thyself the blessed trust of the Psalmist, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thy rod and Thy staff comfort me"?

THE DISCIPLE.

I know that I am not forsaken, yet the sense of my own unworthiness makes me find difficulty in realizing to myself that I am under an ever-abiding protection. In truth, I am more afraid of presumptuous confidence than of losing my full share of Divine comfort. I have read in books of devotion most vivid descriptions of the happiness of the redeemed, and in the night watches visions have from time to time enwrapped my senses. But to these I never willingly give way, lest I be misled by excited imagination.

THE MASTER.

Thou art right to be on thy guard against the mere delusions of fancy ; and a deep veil of mystery overhangs futurity ; yet enough is disclosed in the revealed Word of God to cheer the faithful through the gloom with which the valley of the shadow of death seems to us enveloped.

THE DISCIPLE.

There are, indeed, passages on which I love to dwell, though unable to bring them fully home to myself. That in the Presence of God

there will be fulness of joy, and at His right hand pleasures for evermore¹; that, restored to the image of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, we shall be likened in our degree to His glorious humanity; that we shall company with the assembly of saints and angels, and be employed in adoration, and in acts of loving obedience; and this through ages which will never end,—here are, indeed, blessings beyond all imagination. Would only that I could feel sure of entering into the Kingdom, even were I to stand for ever but just within the threshold!

THE MASTER.

If it were only in their own fitness that men could appear, who among the myriads of mankind could ever enter? Yet we know that the courts of Heaven will be full, and the beatific vision be disclosed to countless generations. It is not they who fear, but they who do not fear, who will miss the way. To those who patiently await their summons, the door will be eventually opened.

THE DISCIPLE.

What thou sayest is true, and I rest in hope.

¹ Ps. xvi. 12.

Yet how far removed from those transports of joy with which so many face the King of Terrors ! The strength of their faith seems to enable them not merely to look forward with hope, but with triumphant certainty.

THE MASTER.

Faith will remove mountains, and what mountains more difficult than those which sin has raised around us ? But while God is the giver of faith, presumption is the devil's counterfeit. The one leads to the haven of rest, the other decoys over a precipice. Enthusiasm will too often mistake one for the other ; but of this you may feel certain, that your hold on Divine grace is not less secure because you distrust yourself ; nor is your faith less firm because it does not produce ecstatic feelings, nor speak in a tone of triumph.

THE DISCIPLE.

And yet I would believe that my sense of the Divine Presence becomes day by day more vivid. As the shadows deepen round me, and time is drawing to its close, a light like the Shekinah penetrates through ; and while my soul shrinks

at its own unfitness, corruption still adhering to its freest movements, and while nature stands trembling at the brink of the dark gulf, methinks if I could again hear the voice which once has spoken to me, I could face the prospect with confidence, if not with joy. For "whom have I, Lord, in heaven, but Thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth: but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever²."

THE VOICE OF THE HOLY ONE.

I am, my son, thy Alpha and Omega, thy beginning and end. While the Holy Spirit has dwelt within thee, in the unity of the Godhead, I have been ever present; and if thou perceive now My Presence more vividly than heretofore, it is that the delusions of earth are loosening their hold. I know what the fear of death is, for I have encountered it. My humanity has borne what thou art about to pass through. And as an angel came to support Me in My agony, so hast thou a guardian spirit ever at thy side, who will bring thee through the last

² Ps. cxliii. 23, 24.

conflict to the place of rest. Employ, then, the time that yet remains, it may not be long, in a close inquiry into the inward secrets of thy heart. Bring every act of thy life in strictest judgment before thee. Open to Me the full register of thy sins. Weep contritely over what is noted in My book against thee, and I will tell thy flittings, and put thy tears into My bottle³, not to thy condemnation, but to thy pardon. Put thy trust, then, in Me. I am not extreme to mark what thou hast done amiss. Thy contrition I look to with favour; thy yearnings with love. They who approach Me on presumption are not Mine; but come in penitence and humility, and I will not shut thee out. Though a tender melancholy may hang over the thought of the dissolution of those ties which have been the solace of thy life, thy affections will not die; they are reserved for further development. Thus prepared and waiting, thy gloom will disperse, thy nerves be braced for the coming encounter, thy hopes be animated by the consciousness that though thy flesh crumble to dust, it will be reanimated; having been sown in corruption it will be raised

³ Ps. lvi.

in incorruption. Unworthy as thou feel thyself, I will present thee to the Father as one I have redeemed; and having guided thee by My counsel, after that I will receive thee with glory⁴. Truly, My son, in the words of the Psalmist, thou shalt behold My Presence in righteousness, and when thou awakest up after My likeness, thou shalt be satisfied with it⁵. "He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly⁶."

THE DISCIPLE.

Even so come, Lord Jesus.

⁴ Ps. lxxiii. 23.

⁵ Ps. xvii. 16.

⁶ Rev. xxii. 20.

THE END.

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